United Nations S/PV.6099

Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6099th meeting

Wednesday, 25 March 2009, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Shalgham	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Guillermet
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Turkey	Mr. Ilkin
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Quarrey
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

09-27987 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and Italy, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Barbalić (Bosnia and Herzegovina) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Gaedtke (Germany) and Mr. Riccardo (Italy) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2009/154, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, the Russian Federation, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Austria, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Japan, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mexico, Russian Federation, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1869 (2009).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.20 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.6100

Security Council

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6100th meeting

Wednesday, 25 March 2009, 10.20 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Shalgham	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Mr. Zhang Yesui
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Turkey	Mr. Ilkin
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Quarrey
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	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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09-27993 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Afghanistan, Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, the Republic of Korea, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Norway, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Qatar, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Shalev (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 23 March 2009 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2009/153 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council that will be held on Wednesday, 25 March 2009, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 March 2009 from His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Paul Badji.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations. At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Pascoe: Two months after unilateral ceasefires were declared in Gaza, we face a worrying situation of impasse and uncertainty. Despite international engagement and support, very little concrete progress has been made on key issues outlined in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). They include the establishment of a proper ceasefire regime in Gaza, unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance, opening of the crossings, prevention of illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition, and intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

Turning now to the more detailed part of the briefing, let me begin with Palestinian political

developments. Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad announced on 7 March his intention to resign at the end of the month, in order to bolster efforts to form a national conciliation government. President Mahmoud Abbas asked the Prime Minister to remain in office until the reconciliation dialogue was brought to a conclusion.

Between 10 and 19 March, Palestinian factions, as well as independents, assembled in Cairo under Egyptian auspices, with the goal of reaching agreement prior to the League of Arab States summit meeting to be held in Doha on 30 March. Egyptian officials report progress on certain aspects of the issues under discussion, namely the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), elections, government, security and reconciliation. However, the talks adjourned without an agreement and are expected to reconvene on 1 April. We reiterate our support for this process, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009).

Egypt hosted the International Conference on the Palestinian Economy and Gaza Reconstruction in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March. The Secretary-General joined representatives from some 80 countries and multilateral organizations in responding to the Palestinian Authority's Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan. Donors generously pledged some $4.5 billion for humanitarian and economic relief.

As he outlined at the Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Prime Minister Fayyad has initiated three large-scale interventions for Gaza's recovery process, aimed at rebuilding houses, agricultural development and private sector recovery. The United Nations supports the Palestinian Authority's relief and recovery efforts and continues to implement projects under the flash appeal, while simultaneously trying to restart projects dormant for many months prior to the military operation due to lack of material allowed in by Israel.

Discussions continue on convening the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in the near future. Key challenges to be addressed include the need for increased budget support for the Palestinian Authority, more clarity on how to channel the funds pledged in Sharm el-Sheikh for Gaza's recovery and on the need to address the overall framework for economic growth in the occupied Palestinian territory.

However, the intolerable situation at Gaza's crossings remains the key impediment to bringing help and hope to the people of Gaza. From 15 February to 21 March, a total of 3,633 truckloads — a weekly average of 727 — entered Gaza through the various crossing points from Israel and through Rafah. Roughly 85 per cent of all imports consisted of foodstuffs and medical supplies, whereas construction materials, spare parts and other industrial goods remained almost totally banned. While there has been an increase in the amount of goods getting into Gaza, and the Israeli Cabinet announced on 22 March that foodstuffs from relevant sources would be allowed into Gaza without restriction, the quality and quantity of imports are insufficient compared to needs. For that reason, the United Nations reiterates its call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law and to open the crossings for emergency supplies and reconstruction materials, without which there will be no way to rebuild Gaza.

The quantity of industrial fuel and cooking gas is also insufficient, as only about 70 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, of the weekly needs enter Gaza. A total ban remains in place on the import of petrol and diesel, except for small quantities delivered to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

According to the International Monetary Fund, the continued restriction on the entry of cash and the inability of many, including Palestinian Authority employees, to withdraw salaries from the banks affect the livelihoods of approximately half a million Gazans. UNRWA and other international partners are unable to distribute cash assistance and to settle payments for social hardship cases.

We continue to be concerned that, despite Egyptian efforts, no ceasefire regime is in place. In addition, there has been no breakthrough in efforts to secure the release of Corporal Shalit and several hundred Palestinian prisoners, despite the intensification of efforts. Following an Israeli announcement on 17 March that agreement had not been reached, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) arrested 10 Hamas leaders in the West Bank, including a former deputy prime minister of the Palestinian Authority. The Israeli Cabinet announced on 22 March its intention to remove privileges not mandated by legal requirements or treaty obligations from Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners.

In the absence of a ceasefire, violence continues. During the reporting period, more than 100 rockets and

mortars were fired into Israel from Gaza. Those attacks, targeting civilian areas, are irresponsible and must cease. In addition, there were 12 Israeli air strikes, killing five Palestinians and injuring 30. We call for an end to all acts of violence and for respect of international humanitarian law by all parties.

Four United Nations Mine Action Teams continue working in Gaza to remove and deactivate unexploded ordinance. One UNRWA and one municipal school have been cleared, along with the UNRWA warehouse at the Karni crossing. There has been no development regarding the return or identification of a new location of the ordinance, including several unexploded bombs that went missing in February 2009.

We are concerned by recent actions of the de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza purporting to assert control over the Palestinian Authority Department of External Medical Treatment. If not reversed without delay, that step could prevent referrals from Gaza of patients needing urgent or complex medical care not available there.

The members of the Board of Inquiry into incidents in Gaza, established by the Secretary-General, have returned from the region and the Board is now working on its report. As the Council is aware, the Board was tasked to review and investigate a number of specific incidents that occurred in the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, in which death or injuries occurred or damage was done at United Nations premises. The Board will submit its report to the Secretary-General when he returns to New York in early April.

During the reporting period, a number of allegations emerged from Israel Defense Forces soldiers that they engaged in improper conduct towards civilians during Operation Cast Lead. On 19 March, the IDF Military Advocate General instructed the military police to probe those allegations.

Special Coordinator Serry is in Gaza today, and his consultations with business leaders and civil society representatives have underscored the desperate need for a new approach to Gaza based on a ceasefire, open crossings, rejuvenation of the private sector and Palestinian reconciliation. Without those, the many unresolved issues, combined with the absence of an active negotiations track and continued suffering, could portend a quick return to violence.

A new Israeli Government has yet to be formed following the elections for the Knesset last month. President Peres commissioned Likud party leader Binyamin Netanyahu to try to form a Government on 20 February, and Mr. Netanyahu remains engaged in intensive consultations with several parties to that end.

We continue to follow with concern negative actions on the ground in the West Bank, where insufficient steps are being taken to lift the weight of the occupation and to implement commitments. The rejection by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior of a planning scheme submitted by residents of the Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem has given rise to concerns that it could pave the way for the demolition and building of a municipal park in a sensitive area of the city populated by more than 1,000 Palestinians. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities also served dozens of new orders for demolition and eviction, as well as against structures located in Area C of the West Bank which, if implemented, could affect hundreds of Palestinian residents throughout East Jerusalem. We call on the Government of Israel to stop house demolitions in East Jerusalem and generally to refrain from unilateral actions that may prejudge final status issues.

In the affected areas of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, it is extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain building permits. Quartet Representative Tony Blair drew attention last week to the fact that, without changes in the current system applied to areas of the West Bank under full Israeli military and administrative control, Palestinians will be prevented from improving their standard of living and from developing their land.

Also in Jerusalem, on 21 March, Israeli security forces disrupted a Palestinian celebration marking East Jerusalem as a capital of Arab culture. Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remain closed by Israeli order, and the construction of illegal settlements continues in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank. No action has been taken to remove outposts. Settlement activity, including in the highly sensitive E-1 area, continues to deprive Palestinians of land for development and agriculture and to create facts on the ground that severely prejudice final status issues.

The Ministry of Defence also approved construction plans for a settlement near Hebron. Let me reiterate before this Council that Israel's

obligations under the Road Map are clear. Settlement activity, including so-called natural growth, must be frozen and outposts must be removed.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, the more than 600 obstacles to movement continue to make normal social and economic interactions impossible for the Palestinian residents there. Construction of the barrier continued in the occupied Palestinian territory away from the Green Line, contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

In the context of Palestinian Road Map obligations, Palestinian security forces remain highly visible in urban centres in the West Bank, prevent militants from conducting activities or displaying illegal weapons and continue their efforts to ensure law and order. However, no major operations or new deployments have taken place since reconciliation talks began in Cairo, and more than a hundred Hamas prisoners were released from Palestinian Authority jails as a goodwill gesture in the context of the reconciliation talks.

There have been some gradual improvements regarding cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian security forces, including the recent return of hundreds of rifles confiscated in 2002 and an easing of the closure regime in and around Nablus. Nevertheless, the IDF continues to raid West Bank towns and villages on a daily basis, citing security concerns. According to United Nations statistics, IDF operations in the West Bank have more than doubled in frequency since the end of the Gaza crisis, with nearly two hundred carried out during the reporting period.

Also during the reporting period, two Israeli policemen were killed by Palestinians in an attack in the Jordan Valley and two other policemen were injured in another attack in West Jerusalem. On 21 March, Israeli police reported that a large bomb had been found and defused in the car park of a shopping mall in Haifa. Two Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces, and 82 were injured. Most injuries occurred during protests against the barrier and against settlement expansion. During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 26 incidents involving Israeli settlers targeting Palestinians, which resulted in seven injuries. Twenty-eight people were reportedly wounded in Israel on 24 March during clashes between police and demonstrators marching in the vicinity of the town of Umm al-Fahm.

The Secretary-General looks forward to attending the summit of the League of Arab States on 30 March and offers his encouragement for Arab unity in support of Palestinian unity under President Abbas and the central importance of the Arab Peace Initiative. In that respect, we take note that Saudi Arabia hosted a meeting with Syria, Egypt and Kuwait in Riyadh on 11 March aimed at strengthening ties within the Arab world and that participants agreed to support the Palestinian reconciliation process under way. The Secretary-General continues to support the holding of an international conference in Moscow in the near future.

During the reporting period, senior United States officials visited Damascus, and Syrian President Assad has indicated his country's readiness to renew indirect negotiations with a new Israeli Government. On the ground, settlement activity in the occupied Syrian Golan continued, although the situation was otherwise quiet. We continue to stress the importance and potential of Israeli-Syrian negotiations and hope that it will be possible in the year ahead to further that track, alongside a reinvigorated Israeli-Palestinian track.

I now turn to Lebanon. Mindful that the Special Coordinator for Lebanon briefed the Council on 10 March on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), I should just like to touch on a few issues.

On 23 March 2009, the relative calm that had prevailed in Lebanon for several weeks was interrupted when Kamal Medhat, Deputy PLO Representative in Lebanon and a high-ranking Fatah member, was killed by a roadside bomb outside the entrance to Saida's Mieh Mieh camp. In the explosion, three of Medhat's bodyguards were also killed and two other persons were severely injured. Palestinian as well as Lebanese political leaders have reached out to Palestinian faction leaders in the camps in an attempt to mitigate potential tensions on the ground. The Secretary-General has condemned that terrorist attack. He expressed his hope that the perpetrators of that crime will be promptly brought to justice and noted that such actions must not be allowed to endanger the climate of calm that currently prevails in Lebanon.

Campaigning for the 7 June elections has started, leading to increased political rhetoric among the

country's numerous political groups. Parties have yet to announce their electoral lists, but consultations on candidates are under way. Candidates have until 7 April to register.

A fifth session of the national dialogue, bringing together Lebanon's 14 main political leaders, took place on 2 March under the aegis of President Sleiman. Participants agreed to develop proposals for a national defence strategy. It was also agreed at the dialogue that all parties will work to ensure that the elections are conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. A further session of the dialogue is planned for 28 April.

A ceremony took place on 9 March to mark the start of reconstruction in the Nahr el-Bared camp. Securing adequate funding to complete the work remains an issue of major importance.

On 16 March, the Lebanese embassy in Syria was inaugurated. The Lebanese Ambassador to Syria will take up his post in mid-April. On 24 March, Lebanese President Sleiman accepted the credentials of the newly appointed Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon. Those appointments come at a timely juncture and are welcome developments that fulfil one of the key provisions of Security Council resolution 1680 (2006).

The overall situation during the month in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has been generally quiet. Progress on the project of visibly marking the Blue Line continued to be made this month, with four additional points having been agreed for marking. Israeli air violations continued on an almost daily basis during the reporting period.

It is important that the Quartet and the international community act with unity of purpose to help stabilize Gaza and reinvigorate the peace process. We need to have both Israeli and Palestinian Governments that are clearly committed to the two-State solution. We need a continuation of negotiations, the implementation of commitments on the ground and a strategy for de-escalating tensions and addressing the urgent humanitarian needs in Gaza.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your new post as Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations and wish you every success. I also congratulate you and your sisterly country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the current month. We are fully confident of your ability to wisely guide the Council's work. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Japan for his skilled and outstanding leadership of the Council last month. In addition, I wish to express our appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

Since the Council's most recent open debate on this item (*see S/PV.6061*), following the monthly briefing in December 2008, we have witnessed a dramatic deterioration on all fronts in the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In spite of the guarded optimism that we expressed during that debate, which following the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008) — which, inter alia, reaffirmed the commitment to the two-State solution, declared support for the peace negotiations launched at Annapolis in November 2007 and reaffirmed their irreversibility — we are now at a juncture in which peace seems more remote than ever and the situation on the ground has become even more volatile.

As we are all aware, resolution 1850 (2008) was the first resolution adopted by the Council on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in more than four and a half years, despite Israel's systematic violations of international law and United Nations resolutions in the occupied Palestinian territory, which only strengthened Israel's impunity and lawlessness and hastened the deterioration of the situation. Thus, shortly after the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), and instead of implementing measures to build the confidence and trust necessary for peacebuilding, we bore witness yet again to Israel's blatant disrespect for the Council, the peace process and all legal norms, demonstrated by its savage war against the Gaza Strip, launched in disregard for all standards of military conduct and human decency and with disastrous humanitarian and political consequences.

That brutal and merciless military aggression against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population ravaged a tiny area that was already gravely deprived

and suffering as a result of years of the unlawful Israeli blockade. We are all aware by now of the human and physical tolls of destruction deliberately inflicted by the occupying Power during that three-week aggression, the magnitude of which was unprecedented since the occupation began in 1967.

A final tally of the casualties of the Israeli aggression reveals that more than 1,400 Palestinians were killed. The overwhelming majority of these were civilians, including hundreds of children and women, while more than 5,500 Palestinians, including more than 1,800 children, were injured. I have with me a photograph of one of those children. Many sustained permanent injuries and maiming as a result of the excessive, indiscriminate and lethal use of force, which included prohibited weaponry and ammunition used by the occupying forces against the civilian population.

The physical toll of destruction wantonly caused by Israel in the Gaza Strip is equally immense. Billions of dollars will be required to rebuild Gaza, where the occupying Power damaged or completely destroyed more than 21,000 homes and refugee shelters; thousands of business properties, including agricultural farmlands; vital civilian infrastructure, including water, sanitation and electricity systems; and roads, hospitals, ambulances, mosques, schools, national institutions and several United Nations facilities.

The horrifying facts have become all too clear, so I will not dwell on the details. However, I wish to take a moment to urge a closer look at the human side of this tragedy. We must stop perceiving the killing of civilians in armed conflict as simply a silence that is associated with death. Only when we begin to understand the maddening and destructive force that defines killing can we begin to understand the depth of the trauma, anguish and suffering inflicted on a people forced to endure such military assaults without a safe place to hide or to flee to. The deafening cries and paralysing screams of fear and pain of the children, women and men killed and wounded and of their shattered, terrorized families — those were the real sights, sounds and core of a war in which no distinction was made between combatants and civilians.

I had the honour of being in Cairo two weeks ago as part of a delegation from the Palestine Committee of the United Nations. We visited a hospital in Cairo and saw with our own eyes dozens of injured Palestinians. One of them was the child depicted in the photograph I have here. We took that photograph with Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. This child's name is Mahmoud Haani, and he caused the international delegation to weep when he told us his story. He asked us to take a message in the name of the thousands of martyrs and wounded, and he asked us to pose a question to Israel, the occupying Power: "Why did you cause me to lose my eyesight and to ruin my future? I am a child and only 12 years old. My name is Mahmoud Haani." I have conveyed his message to the Security Council and the Secretary-General, and every person with a conscience is responsible for holding accountable the criminals who carried out these crimes and for ensuring that they face the justice they so deserve.

The task of recovery has now begun, including attempts to heal the wounds of families whose lives have been shattered and forever altered by the brutal attack and who must cope not only with grief and loss — and, for many, renewed displacement — but who must also struggle to survive under the deplorable living conditions caused by the ongoing illegal Israeli blockade, which constitutes collective punishment of the entire population. The situation is as abnormal and unstable as can be imagined.

We are fully cognizant of the short- and long-term consequences of this crisis and know that the road ahead as we rebuild and heal our society will be extremely difficult. Not only funding, but monumental efforts will be needed to help repair the physical, psychological and societal damage and to achieve a just resolution of the conflict that will fulfil the rights and needs of the Palestinian people to freedom and human dignity in their homeland after decades of loss, oppression, statelessness and suffering.

Nevertheless, we reiterate our appreciation to all countries and organizations throughout the world that are supporting the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza, including those that participated in the donor conference at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. In that connection, we extend our thanks and appreciation to the Arab Republic of Egypt for generously hosting that important conference. We are deeply grateful for the outpouring of solidarity and generous support for our people. Moreover, we thank the United Nations and all of its agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, which in all circumstances have continued to provide invaluable assistance to the Palestinian people in all

fields, particularly emergency health care and food sustenance, aimed at alleviating the humanitarian crisis.

While addressing humanitarian needs, we must also focus on other issues necessary for stabilizing and restoring some normalcy to Gaza. The achievement of a permanent, durable ceasefire is one such priority. At the same time, the inhumane Israeli blockade of Gaza must be lifted to end the imprisonment of our people. The immediate long-term opening of all border crossings is imperative and must allow for the import of all essential supplies, including sufficient food, medicine and fuel, as well as building supplies necessary for reconstruction and other goods and commercial flows necessary for economic recovery.

If Israel continues the punitive blockade on the movement of persons and goods into and out of Gaza, it will only ensure an increase in the poverty, despair, indignation and frustration of the Palestinian people and the peoples of the region.

In addition, serious steps must be taken to pursue accountability for Israel's crimes against the Palestinian civilian population. We reiterate our calls to the international community, including the Security Council, to investigate the grave breaches of international law committed by the occupying forces in Gaza, bearing in mind, inter alia, articles 146, 147 and 148 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. All crimes, including the wilful killing of civilians, wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, must be investigated and the perpetrators must be prosecuted.

Our consciences will not allow these barbaric war crimes against our people to go unpunished. Evidence continues to be collected, and all options are being explored. The Palestinian leadership has taken initial steps in this regard and will continue to act responsibly and collectively by all appropriate means, including through the Security Council, to ensure that the law is upheld and justice is served. We will thus work diligently to follow up the findings of the Secretary-General's board of inquiry, of the fact-finding commission to be dispatched by the Human Rights Council and of any other relevant investigations being carried out.

In this connection, I refer to the important letter recently conveyed to the Secretary-General and Security Council from prominent individuals in the field of international justice and reconciliation of conflict, calling for the establishment of a United Nations commission of inquiry to investigate all serious violations of international humanitarian law committed during the Gaza conflict. As stated by the distinguished signatories:

(*spoke in English*)

> "We have seen at first hand the importance of investigating the truth and delivering justice for the victims of conflict and believe it is a precondition to move forward and achieve peace in the Middle East."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Indeed, only in this way can we seek to end Israel's impunity, prevent the recurrence of such crimes and progress towards securing a just and lasting peace and coexistence between the two peoples.

While the human misery and hardship quotient in the Gaza Strip has risen to intolerable levels, the situation in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, also remains volatile. Israel continues its military raids and arrest operations in the West Bank, adding daily to the thousands of imprisoned Palestinians, including children, women and elected officials, whose release we continue to demand. Also, and of particularly grave concern, is Israel's ongoing settler colonization campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, which it is pursuing in grave breach and defiance of international law, United Nations resolutions and the International Court of Justice advisory opinion, and in total contradiction to the objectives and spirit of the peace process.

In letter after letter, statement after statement — including the statement by President Mahmoud Abbas at the Council's special meeting on 26 September 2008 to specifically address this issue (*see S/PV.5983*) — we have drawn attention to this unlawful campaign and cautioned about its destructive impact on the situation on the ground and on the peace process. We have repeatedly appealed to the Council to uphold its responsibilities and act to compel the occupying Power to comply with its legal obligations and bring to an immediate halt all settlement activities and all acts of settler terrorism and violence against the Palestinian people. Regrettably, the lack of action and Israel's

refusal to respect international law have created a tense and dangerous situation on the ground and completely undermined the peace process.

Even during the peace process, this massive colonization campaign has never ceased. In fact, in the period since the Annapolis conference, it has multiplied 17-fold. I repeat, settlement activities have multiplied 17-fold, at a minimum. The illegal campaign to expropriate Palestinian land continues, as do efforts to carry out a de facto annexation. For this purpose, Israel continues the expansion of settlements and settlement outposts; the construction of settlement infrastructure; the transfer of thousands more Israeli settlers to the occupied territory; the construction of bypass roads and of the wall; the imposition of a racist permit regime, residency restrictions and hundreds of checkpoints; demolitions of Palestinian homes; and excavations, all of which are particularly intense in and around occupied East Jerusalem.

Indeed, the situation in and around East Jerusalem is most critical, as Israel continues to de-populate the city of its Palestinian inhabitants while simultaneously promoting its Judaization by all of the aforementioned unlawful actions, including in the area of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the Old City. The character and physical landscape of the city continues to be changed by the occupying Power, including through measures to isolate it from the rest of the West Bank. In addition to non-stop settler colonization, Israel also continues to impose a closure on Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem and to obstruct Palestinian cultural events and development in the city, including the prevention of recent events in connection with the celebration of "Jerusalem: Capital of Arab Culture 2009".

While the Security Council and General Assembly have repeatedly declared such measures unlawful and null and void, more is needed at this critical juncture than declarations and statements. Action must be taken to halt all Israeli colonization measures aimed at illegally and unilaterally determining the fate of the city, for there can be no peace without East Jerusalem — the capital and heart of the future Palestinian State.

The intent of all such illegal measures and practices by Israel is clear: it is to dramatically alter the demographic composition, character, geographic nature and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, so as to entrench its presence on the land in order to prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations in the peace process in Israel's favour.

On the ground, such flagrant breaches continue to affect all aspects of Palestinian life, undermine the territory's contiguity, integrity and unity, and inflame tensions. The separation, isolation and cantonization of Palestinian communities by the settlements, the separation wall and the checkpoints, which can only be likened to apartheid and segregation, are gravely affecting these communities and destroying their societal fabric. In the peace process, these provocative, illegal Israeli actions have undermined the drive for peace, poisoning the atmosphere between the two sides and tainting the process as a whole, calling into question Israel's commitment to the process and credibility as a "partner for peace".

Colonization and the peace process cannot coexist. Israel's settlement activities are totally contradictory to the peace process and the core principle of land for peace sustaining it. This illegitimate policy has repeatedly damaged the peace process and is physically destroying the prospects for achieving the two-State solution for peace on the basis of the 1967 borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the peace process — on which there is international consensus — and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We thus reaffirm that continuing negotiations under such conditions would be futile and unacceptable. A process under such conditions will never achieve its goal of two States living side by side in peace and security. The Palestinian leadership has always negotiated in good faith, but we cannot continue blindly in this process while Israel destroys all chances for the realization of our legitimate national aspirations.

The international community, including the Quartet, the main sponsor of the peace process, must realize that continued declarations or mild appeals to Israel will no longer suffice. More of the same will not change this grave situation and, worse still, further appeasement will only deepen the problem. In the face of continued defiance, real and serious action, including practical measures, by the Quartet and the international community as a whole is required to bring an end to such destructive and unlawful Israeli

practices, which jeopardize the viability of the future independent State of Palestine and the prospects for peace and stability in our region.

Israel, the occupying Power, must be compelled to cease immediately all settlement and related colonization activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and abide by its obligations under international law in that regard, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. Moreover, demands must be made upon Israel to clearly affirm its respect for its Road Map obligations and other peace process commitments in both word and deed, to freeze, all settlement activities, including so-called natural growth, and to dismantle the outposts.

In this regard, we express serious concern about the shift to the far right of the new Israeli Government and over rhetoric and positions that totally contradict the two-State solution for peace, the Quartet principles and the peace process itself. The new Israeli position, inter alia, calls for the expansion of settlements, rejects the establishment of a Palestinian Arab State and insists on full control over Jerusalem, indicating an intention to vigorously pursue Jewish habitation there in order to assert Israeli control over the eastern parts of the city. We therefore emphasize that demands must be made upon Israel to not only talk of peace, but to actually act for peace, just as the Palestinian leadership has done over the past 15 years since the start of the peace process, including by upholding its Road Map obligations.

In this connection and in closing, I wish to make a brief reference to the status of Palestinian reconciliation efforts. Despite the stall in the talks mediated by Egypt, we remain hopeful of achieving unification of the Palestinian political factions in order to strengthen our efforts in pursuit of our just national cause, which continues to confront so many challenges. Arrangements are being made for a transitional Government and elections and to address other priority issues. We reaffirm our intention to work hard and seriously to heal the divisions and to achieve the national unity so vital to the achievement of our legitimate national rights.

In this regard, we urge the international community, particularly after having witnessed the disastrous ramifications of recent years, to engage diplomatically with a unified, representative Palestinian leadership. That is imperative in order to allow us together to address, with coordinated and serious action, the many urgent issues we currently face and to advance the overall goal of a just, comprehensive, lasting and peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): I would like to acknowledge the presence of Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and thank him for his informative briefing.

Our region is at an important juncture that may determine the future of the Middle East for some time to come. There is much reason for optimism, but also cause for concern. In the Middle East, moderates are working towards peace. These are the true partners in building a secure future for the region. In contrast, there are also extremists who use every opportunity to sabotage progress made and seek to destroy good will, hopes and aspirations on all sides. Among these are the Hamas and Hizbollah terrorist organizations, led, supported, harboured, financed and trained by their Iranian and Syrian patrons. Many would agree. Iran continues to threaten to wipe Israel off the map, and its development of nuclear capabilities should sound alarms across the globe. Iran is indeed the real danger to our region, the world and the future.

Let me state in no uncertain terms that Israel is committed to the peace process. However, the peace process must be based, among other things, on the three clear principles set out by the Quartet and the international community: recognition of the State of Israel, renunciation of terrorism and violence, and adherence to previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. Any future Palestinian Government must therefore abide by the same basic conditions, which are fundamental to any relationship between peoples. Lasting peace can be forged only on solid foundations of mutual respect and recognition between leaders, peoples and societies.

Relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority continue to advance in real terms and in a number of areas. In the economic realm, overall domestic production in the West Bank increased by 5 per cent in 2008 and trade with Israel increased by

over a third. In addition, over $1.76 billion in aid was distributed in the West Bank in 2008 — an increase of 74 per cent over the previous year — showing an increase in international confidence in the management of the Palestinian economy. Israel recently removed about 10 roadblocks and 130 temporary barriers in the West Bank. Among these, one particular road, from which a roadblock was removed just recently, remains open in spite of the ruthless murder by terrorists, nine days ago, of two Israeli police officers. As mentioned already, a few days ago, an extremely dangerous car bomb was found and defused at the entrance to a shopping mall in the city of Haifa, preventing catastrophic consequences and the loss of many lives. Meanwhile, the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority have increased their security cooperation in an effort to improve the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians.

These positive developments, and others, are proof that confidence-building steps, taken by those who cherish a genuine desire for progress, can bring the parties closer to their common goal.

In contrast, the situation in Gaza remains problematic. Since 18 January, over 100 rockets and 60 mortars have been launched into Israel from Gaza, including a Qassam rocket that landed near the coastal city of Asheklon just yesterday. As we have stated before, Israel will not tolerate a return to the status quo ante, with continued terrorist attacks jeopardizing civilians throughout the southern part of my country. Israel's obligation was, is and will continue to be to safeguard the security of its citizens.

Let me turn for a minute to the Palestinian Permanent Observer. I would like to say that, indeed, civilians on both sides, including children, unfortunately bear the burden of the conflict. I could tell the story of the children of Sderot, Ashkelon and Ashdot, who are also asking themselves and their parents why more than 1,000 rockets were fired at them, preventing them from living a normal life — and this, after Israel fully withdrew from Gaza. For example, the child Osher Tuito, who was a successful football player and lost his leg from a Qassam, is asking those questions every day after he had to move from Ashdot to Ashkelon, where he is still exposed to Qassam rockets. Indeed, each side has stories to tell. Let us not use those stories — except only to advance and try to unite in order to achieve peace for our peoples.

Unfortunately, some actors in the region continue to give direct support to Hamas in Gaza, by various attempts and through various venues, providing it with offensive capabilities. The use of tunnels under Gaza's southern border is ongoing. The danger remains. While we are encouraged by the willingness of members of the international community to tackle the smuggling of military capabilities, as witnessed at the recent London conference, tangible measures must immediately be taken against smuggling, as only concrete action will help to stabilize the region.

Let me remind this important Council that Corporal Gilad Shalit continues to be held hostage by terrorists. This is a dire humanitarian problem. Four days ago we marked 1,000 days and nights since his unlawful, criminal detention in June 2006. During this time, all access to him has been denied. Defying all standards of decency and humanity, Hamas has been attempting to cruelly manipulate the hearts and minds of the Israeli people, raising the price of his release during negotiations. Hamas is exploiting in a most cynical way Israel's sensitivity for human life and the moral values demonstrated throughout the years by the Government of Israel and its people.

It is worth remembering that in the military operation that ended in January, the true targets of Israeli actions were Hamas terrorists, not the citizens of Gaza. Ordinary Gazans were used as human shields by Hamas, who deliberately staged attacks from, and hid in, heavily populated civilian areas.

In spite of the ongoing attacks from Gaza, and despite Israel's commitment to its crucial security needs, we are not indifferent to the humanitarian situation of Gaza's population. More than 140,000 tons of humanitarian supplies and 13.5 million litres of fuel for Gaza's power station have been delivered into the Gaza Strip since 18 January. That amounts to an average of 140 trucks per day entering Gaza. However, let me state clearly Israel's position: expanded activity at the crossings will be discussed upon the release of Gilad Shalit.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, while we recognize the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in southern Lebanon, more needs to be done to ensure the continued stability of the area. Israel recently witnessed the most serious violations of resolution 1701 (2006) since it was adopted. Rockets

were fired from Lebanon into Israel, wounding civilians. During the past several months, UNIFIL and the LAF have discovered a number of other rockets, preventing them from also being launched against my country. These developments should be cause for great concern to States that desire regional tranquillity.

For years, Israel has been alerting the Security Council to Hizbullah's ongoing military build-up in southern Lebanon. This terrorist organization, backed and supported by Iran and Syria, continues to increase its presence and strength in the area, using private homes and other civilian property for its activities.

Thus, Israel joins the international community in its call for robust action against arms smuggling along the Syrian-Lebanese border, in accordance with the recommendations set out in the report of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team II, transmitted by the Secretary-General in document S/2008/582.

This is a time of great flux in the Middle East. Radicals are competing with moderates for domination. There is no better time than today for the international community to show its support for moderate voices and to assert its resolute opposition to terrorists and those who support them. We ask Member States to add their vocal and tangible support in the quest for a durable peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now give the floor to members of the Council.

Mr. Rugunda (Uganda): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on the Middle East.

Uganda welcomes the briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, which we believe presents an opportunity for United Nations Members to gauge overall progress and help focus on the way forward. We note from the briefing that limited progress has been recorded since the briefing given in January 2009 (see S/PV.6077).

The relative peace and quiet that has characterized the last few weeks is encouraging. The regrettable incidents reported by Mr. Pascoe are a reminder to us all that the momentum for peace must be sustained and consolidated in order to find a lasting solution to the problem of the Middle East. We commend Egypt and other partners for the role they have played and continue to play in mediating ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas. Uganda welcomes the appointment of a number of special envoys to the Middle East and is encouraged that most of them have already started their work in the region.

However, the situation still remains fragile. We are concerned about the reports of intermittent hostilities that continue to disrupt the peace. There is need for a durable and fully respected ceasefire as envisioned in resolution 1860 (2009). But that ceasefire will always remain temporary if it is not accompanied by sustained efforts to find a political settlement in the Middle East.

Uganda is convinced that a durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be achieved only through negotiations among the parties concerned. It is of concern that the divisions that exist among the Palestinian groups continue to weaken the negotiation efforts. We therefore commend efforts by Egypt and others for the work done to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

As we have heard, the situation in Gaza remains precarious. The humanitarian situation and reconstruction demands following the disastrous war early this year still pose a huge challenge. Because of the blockade, the overall levels of humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza remain below what is urgently required. The socio-economic infrastructure remains in shambles. We note from the briefing that during the violence many lives were lost and much property destroyed and that the war has caused enormous suffering that is still being experienced even today.

Uganda therefore welcomes the outcome of the international aid conference for Gaza and its reconstruction that was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, in Egypt, where $4.5 billion was pledged. We call on all those countries and organizations that made pledges to honour them.

However, even with the pledged money coming in, dealing with the humanitarian situation and the reconstruction efforts will require that Israel completely lift the blockade in order to facilitate easier humanitarian access. Furthermore, all Palestinians will have to work together to implement the recovery and reconstruction plans.

With regard to Lebanon, we note that the security situation in south Lebanon has been relatively calm in recent months. We welcome the progress made in the

normalization of relations between Lebanon and its neighbours. We also welcome the proposed 7 June parliamentary elections in Lebanon and call on all parties to ensure calm and stability during the electoral period.

Despite the limited progress, we are concerned that the ceasefire is not fully implemented, in contravention of resolution 1701 (2006). In this connection, we call upon Israel and Lebanon to respect the ceasefire. Uganda commends the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and all humanitarian agencies that, despite the very difficult circumstances, continue to provide relief assistance to the people caught in this conflict.

Finally, Uganda will continue to support all the parties in the Middle East in their efforts to achieve comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and other relevant Council resolutions.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): Let me start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his extensive briefing. Let me also underline that Turkey also aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

The tragic events at the start of this year have further complicated the political, humanitarian and socio-economic aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The recent hostilities devastated Gaza, with a heavy death toll of over one thousand lives, mostly women and children. The Palestinians in Gaza are now faced with formidable suffering and hardship. As indicated by the latest report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), growing numbers of Gazans live in extreme poverty, and the numbers of the unemployed keep rising.

On the other hand, Israeli citizens living in the cities adjacent to Gaza should also feel safe and secure. Rocket attacks launched from Gaza have been a constant threat to them.

Time will not, in itself, heal all wounds. Active engagement by the international community is imperative in dressing them. In this context, we are encouraged by the amount of pledges and the level of participation at Sharm el-Sheikh earlier this month, where the international community reiterated its full support for the two-State solution and expressed its expectation for strong commitment on the part of all sides to such a settlement.

In addition to $150 million pledged in Paris in 2007, Turkey announced in Sharm el-Sheikh another contribution of $50 million for specific reconstruction projects in Gaza. Moreover, voluntary contributions of the Turkish people to various donation accounts opened for Gaza have reached almost $50 million. This amount will also be used for reconstruction projects in Gaza.

However, we cannot possibly speak of the reconstruction of Gaza and the return to daily life until the blockade completely ends and the crossings open. There can be no improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians unless restrictions on the movement of people and goods are lifted, not only in the Gaza Strip but also in the West Bank. Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) clearly underlines the need for the comprehensive opening of crossings. That resolution should be fully implemented. We must also ensure that the ceasefire is sustainable and respected by all.

We are increasingly concerned about Israel's ongoing settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Turkey has repeatedly made it clear that settlement-building, which is contrary to Road Map commitments and the two-State solution, is wrong and should stop. None of the parties should take any action that would undermine the peace process and prejudge the final status negotiations. This also applies to the Palestinian factions.

In the aftermath of the unfortunate events, securing Palestinian reconciliation and unity once again becomes an issue of critical importance and urgency. We commend President Abbas for his tireless efforts to achieve that vital goal. The Palestinian cause would be best served if the Palestinian factions settle their differences and join hands. That is a must in order to keep alive and to realize the aspiration for an independent Palestinian State representing all Palestinians. We maintain our contacts with and guidance to different Palestinian groups in this direction.

Turkey is also committed to the empowerment of the Palestinian Authority in the context of the State-building process. We will continue with our

contributions to strengthen the Palestinian Authority and its institutions and economy.

It is an undeniable fact that Israel's need for peace, prosperity and security is best served by a strong and united Palestinian State living side by side with Israel. The Israelis and Palestinians are bound to live next to one another. They can do so either as combatants or as good neighbours and friends. It is high time that they make the right choice.

We have always emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to the issues, since the problems of the region are all interlinked.

We are ready to assist once again in order to achieve the resumption of the indirect talks between Syria and Israel, if the parties so desire.

We welcome the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria and the reciprocal appointment of ambassadors. We are also encouraged by the current American engagement with Syria.

We believe that the forthcoming elections in Lebanon will be an important step in taking the Lebanese people towards a better and brighter future, consolidating the positive developments in the country. We have confidence in the wisdom of the people of Lebanon, that they will not miss this opportunity. For its part, Turkey will remain committed to contribute to the stability of Lebanon through its participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and, through its reconstruction projects, to the prosperity of that country.

We will continue to work for a viable and comprehensive peace on all tracks of the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. I welcome and thank the delegations of Palestine and Israel for their participation in this debate of the Council. We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The serious engagement of Palestinian factions over the past month in a dialogue process mediated by Egypt has led to the establishment of five committees that are working on national reconciliation issues, the successful outcome of the Cairo international conference on the reconstruction of Gaza and the further efforts of the Palestinian Authority to improve socio-economic rehabilitation and reconstruction, especially in the face of the devastating global financial crisis.

These developments, however, remain overshadowed by the extent and scope of the challenges that persist in the region. We condemn Israel's continued military activities and bombardments, its ongoing construction of the separation wall and its expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank. In the same vein, we condemn rocket attacks against Israeli civilians.

Already pauperized by an 18-month blockade and a tight regime of closures and restrictions on movements that date back to the early 1990s, the Palestinian population in Gaza has been driven to the limit of human suffering by the unprecedented aggravation and hardship in the aftermath of the war. The recent events in Gaza only further prove that violence will not and can never be a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. At this politically delicate juncture, pending the formation of a new Government in Israel and the outcome of reconciliation efforts among Palestinian factions, we call upon all the parties concerned to opt for peaceful rather than military means for settling their disputes and to desist from any action that is detrimental to innocent civilians and to the process of negotiations towards a two-State solution to the conflict.

We underline the pressing need for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), especially with regard to a durable, lasting and fully respected ceasefire, the opening of border crossings and intra-Palestinian reconciliation. In that connection, the role played by the United Nations, the League of Arab States and countries of the region remains essential.

We support collective efforts aimed at addressing the heavy casualties and damage to the physical life and psychological well-being of the Palestinian people and the immediate post-conflict needs of affected families, as well as at facilitating long-term recovery and reconstruction in Gaza. We commend United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and other humanitarian organizations for their bravery in rendering emergency assistance to Gazans, and we urge the parties concerned to extend

the fullest cooperation in facilitating humanitarian activities.

We urge all parties concerned to respect international humanitarian and human rights laws in all circumstances. In this connection, we welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to dispatch the board of inquiry to Gaza, and we look forward to the report on the results of its investigation.

A lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East cannot be disassociated from concurrent progress on other, related tracks. We note the steps taken by the Government of Lebanon to assert full authority over its territory, strengthen the country's political stability and socio-economic development and normalize relations with countries of the region. We join the Secretary-General in condemning the recent terrorist attack against PLO personnel in Lebanon and request that the culprits be brought to justice. We call upon all parties in Lebanon to refrain from violence, build on the general momentum of national unity and reconciliation created since the signing of Doha Agreement, in May 2008, and concentrate their efforts on ensuring that the parliamentary elections scheduled for 7 June 2009 are conducted in a free, fair and peaceful manner.

While reiterating our support for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we stress the imperative for all parties concerned to work together to peacefully tackle such outstanding issues as Israel's intensified air violations of Lebanese territory and its continued occupation of the northern part of the village of al-Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, the unresolved status of Shaba'a farms and the environmental contamination and civilian casualties due to Israel's failure to provide the technical strike data on the cluster munitions and landmines used earlier by its forces.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): We welcome this open meeting of the Security Council. We also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

On 16 December 2008, the Security Council held a ministerial-level meeting on the question of the Middle East (6045th meeting) and adopted resolution 1850 (2008), demonstrating its support for political talks between Palestine and Israel and their efforts to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East. The meeting also indicated the international community's expectations for the peaceful coexistence of two States, Palestine and Israel.

However, just 11 days following the adoption of the resolution, the situation in the Middle East experienced precipitous changes. Beginning on 27 December, Israel carried out military actions against the Gaza Strip that lasted more than 20 days and resulted in heavy casualties among Palestinian civilians and enormous loss of property. The Middle East peace process was thus severely tested and suffered a major setback. China wishes to reaffirm that we oppose any attempt to solve disputes through military means, as well as any act of violence targeting civilians.

The current situation in the Middle East remains tense and fragile. The Palestinian and Israeli sides have not yet reached a lasting ceasefire agreement, and hostilities and acts of violence still occur. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is a cause for concern. The reconstruction process is beset by difficulties. The plight of the Palestinian people on the West Bank of the Jordan River is also worrisome.

There are still multiple uncertain factors vis-à-vis the resumption of talks between Palestine and Israel. We appeal to the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint, renounce violence and military means and refrain from any action that may exacerbate the tension. We urge Israel, the occupying Power, to open the border crossings, stop building settlements on the West Bank and allow the Palestinian people to enjoy normal and dignified lives. We are concerned about the plight of the Palestinian people and appeal to the international community to continue to provide humanitarian, development, technical and other kinds of assistance to Palestine.

We believe that, given the tense and fragile Middle East situation, the international community should focus its efforts on the following four areas.

First, the security situation should be consolidated in order to push for a durable ceasefire. The parties concerned should fully implement in good faith resolution 1860 (2009), adopted on 8 January, so as to reach a comprehensive and durable ceasefire arrangement as soon as possible. In this context, the international community must support the efforts undertaken by Egypt and other countries.

Secondly, the commitments for assistance for the reconstruction of the Gaza strip must be honoured in

order to alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground. We welcome the positive outcome of the pledging conference held at Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March and we appeal to the international community to translate the commitments made into concrete actions. Israel must open the border crossings and ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and the materials necessary for reconstruction. At the same time, we expect the Board of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General to give a timely report to the Security Council on the findings of its investigations.

Thirdly, there must be a push for intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is of critical importance to safeguard the Palestinian people's interests and the resumption of the Middle East peace process. We appeal to the various Palestinian factions to engage in sincere talks and resolve their differences.

Fourthly, there must be an expeditious resumption of the Middle East peace process. We have always maintained that political talks are the only correct avenue leading to durable peace in the Middle East. The Security Council should support the Palestinian-Israeli negotiation process in a more proactive manner, and in particular ensure that the relevant resolutions of the Security Council are respected and implemented. We hope that the Quartet will play an even greater role and push for a resumption of political talks between Palestine and Israel on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map, so as to fulfil as soon as possible the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, coexisting in peace.

China stands ready to work with the international community and will continue to play a constructive role in favour of an early proper settlement of the Middle East question and the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I would like to begin by thank you and your delegation for holding a large number of public meetings. We believe that in the eyes of the membership of the Organization, this is a healthy practice. I would also like to thank Mr. Pascoe for the briefing he gave us and to welcome the presence of the representatives of Israel and Palestine.

The last time that the Council debated the situation in the Middle East, the population of Gaza was experiencing dramatic days. Today, we face a different scenario, characterized by relative calm. Despite that, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is still deplorable, and my delegation must once again condemn the terrorist attacks against the territory of Israel and the air attacks on Gaza.

In this context, we recognize the importance of acts of solidarity with the affected peoples, especially the intervention of Egypt which little by little has contributed to reducing tensions and has played a fundamental role in reaching the first agreements.

For Costa Rica, the humanitarian situation in Gaza calls for particular attention. A high percentage of the population there depends on humanitarian assistance. The United Nations must have all the facilities needed to provide humanitarian assistance and to carry out its programmes with no obstructions. Besides that, Gaza's reconstruction and normalization of life for its population are of great importance to us.

The National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza presented by the Palestinian Government is a general framework to reactivate the Gaza economy, which should guide the actions of the international community. In this context, the commitments made during the Sharm el-Sheikh conference of 2 March are a major contribution towards the reconstruction of the territory, which has lost 14 per cent of its infrastructure and 75 per cent of its arable land.

However, the beneficial effects of these contributions for the reconstruction of Gaza will not translate into sustainable results as long as the negotiations are not resumed and as long as no concrete agreements are reached on substantive issues, leading to permanent political solutions, including a permanent ceasefire.

Today it is important to call once again for full respect by the parties for their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law. Accordingly, normalization of border crossings is a major objective. Although there has been an improvement in the entry of basic necessities in recent weeks, the levels of goods entering Gaza are still much lower than those of July 2008. The levels of humanitarian assistance continue to be far lower than what is urgently needed.

The opening of the crossings is vital, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 2 of resolution 1860 (2009). It is also important to put a halt to the illicit traffic of weapons and ammunition and to prevent them from entering Gaza freely. Costa Rica is pleased welcomes the international agreement signed on 13 March in London by representatives of nine countries, in which an action plan was established to respond to the ongoing concerns about the smuggling of arms into Gaza.

Costa Rica is also concerned at each new settlement built in occupied Palestinian territories. The Council should stress the need to put an end to the continued expansion of illegal settlements. We are not unaware of, and the new Government of Israel should not ignore, the broad consensus in the international community on the need to put a halt to the growth of illegal settlements that go against the commitments that have been made.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is of great importance for the return to a peace process in which all Palestinian political actors will take part. It is imperative for Palestinian factions to find common ground, which will make it possible for them to work in a constructive fashion and provide their people with the hope for a life lived in peace and safety.

We know that, among the efforts to improve the situation in the Middle East, those being made by the League of Arab States are decisive. We hope that, at the coming Doha summit, there will be strengthened initiatives to reach lasting peace in the region, leading to the consolidation of an independent Palestinian State, the strengthening of Israel's security and creative coexistence benefiting both peoples.

Costa Rica commends the efforts of the Secretary-General to mandate the Board of Inquiry to investigate the incidents that affected United Nations personnel and installations in Gaza during the recent conflict, and we hope to receive its results in the near future. We believe it important for the credibility of our Organization that all acts of hostility against United Nations installations and its personnel be investigated and that the responsibility for such acts be assigned.

We hope that the Security Council will be part of the solution leading to a last peace between Israel and Palestine and to an environment of peace in the Middle East. The international community must continue to show its commitment by supporting the parties and facilitating their goal of reaching a permanent solution to the conflict and of two States coexisting in peace and security. To that end, we call for fulfilment of the commitments adopted in the peace process on the basis of the Madrid principles, the Road Map, the resolutions of this Council and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Similarly, we recognize the work of all agencies and organizations of the United Nations, in particular that of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on the Middle East peace process. We agree with the main assessments that he presented to us. We were interested to hear the statements of the Permanent Observer of Palestine and of the Permanent Representative of Israel.

Today, the international community must think about how to provide new impetus to the search for peace in the Middle East. The impasse in that area undermines efforts to stabilize the situation in the region. Much will depend on how the Government of Israel conducts itself following the election of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. We are convinced that negotiations with the Palestinians must not be resumed from scratch; they should be pursued taking all previous achievements and agreements into account. The main thing is to ensure that the new Israeli Cabinet stays the course of settling the crisis on the basis of the concept of a two-State solution and resolves itself to the necessity of freezing settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem.

Strengthening the fragile ceasefire in Gaza, making it stable and reciprocal, and further action to restore a fully fledged peace process are urgent tasks. We cannot allow a recurrence of the tragedy of the peaceful inhabitants of Gaza, where thousands of people, including children, fell victims of the violence. It is also necessary to free the citizens of southern Israel from the permanent threat of rocket attacks on their homes. The best way to do that is for all sides fully to implement resolution 1860 (2009).

Clearly, it is important to ensure the implementation of resolution 1850 (2008), which supports a comprehensive peace process in the Middle East. The efforts of Egypt in that regard are of key importance. The international community must continue energetically to support them and we cherish

the hope that its mediation activities will be successful. The donor conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, at which the international community expressed its readiness to pledge more funds than expected for the recovery of Gaza, contributed positively to that end. For its part, Russia will continue to provide the Palestinians with all necessary assistance.

The recent conflict in Gaza has again demonstrated the importance of an intra-Palestinian reconciliation on a mutually acceptable legal basis that includes the Arab Peace Initiative and the Palestine Liberation Organization platform. Dialogue is complex but must be continued. There are no alternatives to that process. We must recognize that the crisis surrounding Gaza has led to calls to withdraw the Arab Peace Initiative. That is of serious concern to us. The Arab Peace Initiative, with the vigorous support of Russia, has become an integral part of the international legal basis for progress towards genuine peace in the region. It is necessary to ensure that we do not go back on that.

We are making preparations for the Moscow conference, on which there is international consensus, based on the decisions in the Security Council resolutions and of the Quartet. We welcome the fact that Mr. Pascoe referred to that important upcoming forum. We will continue our interaction with the Secretary-General and all other colleagues of the Quartet in preparing the Moscow conference. That forum will provide renewed impetus to the peace process and ensure its comprehensive character. Negotiations must be resumed not only on the Palestinian, but also on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, and multilaterally. Only such comprehensive settlement can guarantee the peace and security of all peoples in the region.

Russia is carefully following developments in the situation in Lebanon and political efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to make the June parliamentary elections peaceful and successful. In that regard, we are concerned by the reports from Lebanon of a deterioration in the situation in the Palestinian refugee camps. We remain convinced that we cannot allow the political situation in that country to worsen. The problems of Lebanon must be resolved exclusively through national dialogue and by seeking mutual understanding between political forces in the country. Russia will continue to promote that. We welcome ongoing progress in the development of bilateral relations between Lebanon and Syria. That is another important factor for stability in the region.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): I, too, would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his detailed briefing, and we are grateful that we had the chance to listen to Ambassadors Mansour and Shalev. I wish to align myself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. I will therefore focus on a few aspects that are of particular importance to Austria.

The briefing by Under-Secretary-General Mr. Pascoe once more underscored the urgency of stabilizing the humanitarian situation of the population of Gaza and the need to ensure an early recovery. The results of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference have demonstrated the international community's readiness to help the people in Gaza to rebuild their lives, but, beyond international support, that task requires immediate and decisive action by the parties.

First and foremost, the populations of southern Israel and Gaza need to see full respect for a permanent ceasefire. We are gravely concerned about the fragility of the current provisional ceasefire and we reiterate our condemnation of indiscriminate rocket attacks. We look to Israel to urgently provide full access for aid workers and materials. We note Israel's commitment to alleviating the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We also note that logistical steps have already been taken to improve the delivery of aid. Unfortunately, supplies continue to be highly insufficient in terms of the quantity and scope of goods allowed into the Gaza Strip.

Recovery and reconstruction efforts can advance only if all crossings are immediately and unconditionally opened for the passage of humanitarian aid and commercial flows, including construction materials essential for the rehabilitation of vital infrastructure, homes, clinics and schools. That and the freedom of movement of people are indispensable for a return of normal economic activity and for a dignified future for the Palestinian people.

Progress towards sustainable peace can only come hand in hand with the reconstruction of Gaza as an integral part of a future Palestinian State and prospects for positive economic and social development for all Palestinians. Moving forward on the path to peace also requires rebuilding trust, including by strengthening respect by all for the rule of

law, human rights and international humanitarian law. We also note the ongoing debate on that question in Israel.

Austria reiterates that all allegations of violations of international humanitarian law, by whomever they may have been committed, must be thoroughly investigated. In that context, we welcome the establishment of the Board of Inquiry by the Secretary-General and await its conclusions with interest.

Since the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), there have been serious setbacks and frustrations. Israelis and Palestinians must steer back, and firmly keep course, towards a just and comprehensive peace. For the Palestinian side, that means speaking with one voice and forming a Government committed to work towards a settlement resulting in a two-State solution, with a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

In conformity with the entire European Union, Austria fully supports the Egyptian reconciliation efforts.

As far as the current and any future leadership of Israel is concerned, we hope to see a greater commitment to peace negotiations as well as to the two-State solution. We expect a halt to all activities that jeopardize a negotiated settlement and the viability of the two-State solution, such as the construction of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the construction of the separation barrier on occupied Palestinian land — acts that are contrary to international law. An immediate freeze on all settlement activities, including natural growth, and the dismantlement of outposts built since 2001 would re-establish confidence and strengthen the hand of those committed to peace on the Palestinian side.

Looking beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Austria strongly encourages intensified efforts by the parties on all tracks towards a just and comprehensive regional peace, including the early resumption of the Syrian-Israeli track. We welcome the progress achieved in the exchange of ambassadors between Lebanon and Syria. We wish to underline the continued importance of the Arab Peace Initiative to advancing the vision of security, stability and good-neighbourliness for all countries in the region.

Mr. Tiendrébéogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I should like to join preceding speakers in thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his presentation on the situation in the Middle East. I am particularly grateful for the important information with which he provided us.

As the Security Council meets once again to consider the situation in the Middle East, the Palestinian people — especially those in Gaza — continue to dress the wounds of the December war, which claimed numerous victims, particularly civilians, and destroyed major socio-economic infrastructure.

In the context of the intensified humanitarian crisis that resulted, particularly in Gaza, we welcome the mobilization of the international community, which, from the outbreak of the confrontation, spared no effort not only to achieve the cessation of hostilities, but also to come to the aid of the civilian population.

In that context, we welcome the holding of the donors conference on 2 March 2009 in Sharm el-Sheikh, in Egypt, which came at the right time to respond to the humanitarian crisis and assist in the rebuilding of devastated Gaza. We must now hope that the commitments undertaken on that occasion will be fulfilled as swiftly as possible. That is all the more important because, unfortunately, the challenges to be met remain numerous and the humanitarian needs very great.

Moreover, the conference was another opportunity for the international community to show the degree to which it can display its concern by being in solidarity with a population in distress. My delegation calls on Israel to join in this overall spirit of solidarity and compassion, in particular by lifting the embargo on Gaza and all restrictions on the movement of goods and persons, which are prerequisites for the resumption of socio-economic activity and the success of reconstruction efforts.

The recent events in Gaza have revealed once again the difficult conditions in which the United Nations and humanitarian organizations intervene in times of conflict. Their work — particularly that of United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — is all the more remarkable and praiseworthy for that reason. Therefore, it is important to continue to support them and to ensure the protection and integrity of their staff and infrastructure. In that regard, we hope that the investigations of the

Board of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General will help to shed light on the attacks carried out against United Nations facilities.

We remain greatly concerned by the many escalations that are further exacerbating tension between Israel and Palestine. We invite the parties to refrain from engaging in extremist rhetoric, which calls into question a number of the significant achievements that have been accomplished, including within the framework of the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Also contributing to those escalations is the continued policy of establishing Israeli settlements.

My delegation urges the next Israeli Government to put an end to that policy and to resolutely commit itself to the spirit of the peace process, which, despite difficulties, today still provides us with the best possible prospects for a settlement of the conflict. We should also like to reiterate our appeal to the Palestinian parties to achieve reconciliation and unity. That is why we hope that the inter-Palestinian negotiations currently under way under Egyptian auspices will lead to a Government that unites all Palestinian political sensibilities.

Beyond Gaza and the West Bank, antagonisms are increasingly worsening in the region. We invite all actors to display the utmost restraint in order to create the best possible prospects for the success of the ongoing diplomatic efforts.

In this troubled region, we must welcome the relative calm and stability prevailing in Lebanon. We call on the entire Lebanese political class to continue to abide by the important May 2008 Doha Agreement, and we hope that the June parliamentary elections will be held in optimal conditions of security, transparency and fairness. In order to avoid unnecessary tensions in that country, we wish to stress once again the importance of abiding by resolution 1701 (2006).

The gradual improvement in Syrian-Lebanese relations is another reason for satisfaction. We hope that it will make it possible to resolve outstanding bilateral issues in a consensual and decisive manner.

Finally, returning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we express the hope that the conference at Moscow will be held as soon as possible and that it will help renew the momentum of the Annapolis negotiations. That in turn should, inter alia, lead to the creation of an independent Palestinian State coexisting with Israel in peace and security. However, that will be possible only if the minimal conditions for mutual trust between the parties are created, including an end to the settlement policy, exchanges of prisoners, a lifting of the Gaza blockade, the opening of crossing points, a halt to rocket firings, and inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

For its part, the international community, including the Security Council, must resolutely assist the parties. In other words, if there is to be a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, the contributions of all parties are essential. That is why we invite the United Nations and all States and organizations committed to the process to continue their efforts.

Mr. Quarrey (United Kingdom): I join colleagues in thanking Mr. Pascoe for his briefing this morning, and I also thank the representatives of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

I would like to associate the United Kingdom with the statement to be made later today by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

The situation in Gaza remains of the utmost concern. Little has changed since we last discussed it. The unilateral ceasefires declared by both parties in January are still not underpinned by a proper ceasefire regime. We reiterate our call for both parties to implement in full resolution 1860 (2009).

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains perilous. The United Nations, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, is playing a critical role. We urge Israel to allow free and unfettered access for humanitarian aid and materials into Gaza.

We commend the United Nations framework for the provision of humanitarian assistance in Gaza. Based on important humanitarian principles that all parties should respect, the framework would allow a broader range of material to enter Gaza in such a way that is monitored to ensure that it reaches only its intended recipients.

Gaza also needs help for reconstruction. We were encouraged by the commitments made at the Sharm el-Sheik conference. The United Kingdom announced that we were making available an additional $44 million to help rebuild schools, homes and hospitals.

That brings the United Kingdom's response to the recent Gaza crisis to roughly $70 million. Sharm el-Sheik also reiterated the need to reopen the Gaza crossings to legitimate trade and the movement of people. We believe that is essential both for the reconstruction effort and the peace process more broadly.

While Israel should reopen the crossings, its concerns about the smuggling of illegal arms and ammunition into Gaza must also be addressed. Egypt continues to have the immediate security responsibility, but the international community could do more. That is one of the reasons why we hosted a meeting in London on 13 March, which agreed a programme of action aimed at enhancing efforts to prevent the smuggling of arms, ammunition and weapons components, in support of resolution 1860 (2009).

As the Permanent Representative of Israel said, we should also recall today the plight of Gilad Shalit, who has now been held by Hamas for over 1,000 days. We regard it as deeply regrettable that negotiations to secure his release appear to have broken down. We were also deeply disturbed by the attempted car bombing at a shopping mall in Haifa. It is particularly horrifying that the device was clearly designed to kill and injure innocent civilians.

The recent Gaza conflict was marked by serious allegations of misconduct by both sides. We welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to set up a board of inquiry and to report on incidents of attacks on United Nations facilities. We also welcome the Israeli Government's decision to undertake their own investigation into allegations against its forces, including, we hope, those that have emerged most recently in the media.

While the Council's focus has rightly been on Gaza in recent months, we should not ignore events in the West Bank. We remain deeply concerned by the increase in settlement activity there, including in East Jerusalem, including threats of house demolitions in the Silwan area adjacent to the Old City and the eviction notices issued to the al-Rawi and Hanoun families. As the British Minister for the Middle East, Mr. Bill Rammell, said on 21 March,

> "These eviction notices are not conducive to peace. We call on the Israeli Government to suspend these eviction notices immediately."

The ongoing problems in Gaza and the West Bank reinforce the need to reinvigorate the Middle East political process. We welcome the recent talks in Cairo aimed at Palestinian reconciliation as a step towards creating the Palestinian unity necessary not only for rebuilding Gaza, but also for holding elections and delivering peace. President Abbas should lead that process, supported by the international community.

We look forward to working with the new Israeli Government towards lasting peace in the region. We hope that new Government will make a strong early statement of its intent to engage in the Middle East peace process, based on the two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative. We believe that is the only way to achieve peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Finally, Lebanon's problems too remain unresolved, although there has been some progress, as Mr. Pascoe reported. Ongoing rocket attacks and overflights remain a concern. We would urge all parties to do everything possible to remain calm and make further progress on outstanding issues, including disarmament of militias, securing and delineating the border, and on the status of Ghajar and Sheba'a.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish to begin by conveying my gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his presentation and to the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the ambassador of Israel for their statements. I also wish to voice my full support for the statement to be delivered later by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

It is for the States of the region and the international community to see to it that the current transition period in the region allows the laying of the foundations of peace in the Middle East. As the President of our Republic underscored, peace is possible even if it does require painful concessions and genuine political courage.

I wish to address three main points.

Turning to the situation in Gaza, consolidation of the ceasefire, which requires full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), remains a priority. Resolution 1860 (2009) laid out the main parameters for a durable ceasefire, including the re-opening of checkpoints and the setting up of mechanisms to ensure that the

smuggling of arms is stopped. In that regard, we support the Egyptian efforts and call on all parties to move quickly towards an agreement.

France and the European Union are resolved to shoulder all their responsibilities in supporting the full implementation of the resolution. The European Union has declared its readiness to relaunch the EU Border Assistance Mission — EUBAM Rafah — as soon as conditions allow and has studied the possibility of extending its assistance to other crossing points if security there is guaranteed.

The issue of opening crossing points is decisive to improving the humanitarian situation and to permitting the reconstruction of Gaza to be carried out. In that respect, we welcome the convening of the Sharm el-Sheik conference and the pledges that were announced. It was important that the meeting concerned both Gaza and the entire Palestinian economy. That effort is part of the follow-up to the Paris conference and reminds us that the Palestinian Authority should ensure the administration and ownership of any reconstruction efforts.

There is no military solution to the crisis in Gaza. We have condemned many times, and continue to condemn, the firing of rockets against Israel. We have also condemned Israeli land operations carried out in Gaza and the bombardment by the Israeli army of Palestinian hospitals and premises of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. France recalls that international humanitarian law must be respected everywhere, in all circumstances and by all parties to the conflict. In that context, we supported the decision of the Secretary-General to set up a board of inquiry, and we expect that its conclusions will be presented to the Security Council.

In parallel to efforts mentioned, France continues to support the immediate, unconditional liberation of Gilad Shalit. We support Egyptian mediation efforts and continue to follow discussions under way with great attention.

My second point concerns the stages that must be got through rapidly in order to put the peace process on the right track.

I wish to underscore here, first, the importance of inter-Palestinian reconciliation. Palestinians must be able to speak with a single voice. There will be no peace agreement with only one part of the Palestinian people and no viable Palestinian State without Gaza. Although discussions with a view to inter-Palestinian reconciliation are facing many difficulties, we continue to back the efforts of the Egyptian mediation. We hope that an important step can be taken, in particular in view of the Arab summit in Doha aimed at inter-Palestinian reconciliation. The States of the region, of course, have an important role to play here. When the time is right, we will be ready to work with a Government of national unity that will abide by the fundamental principles of the peace process and will accept to resume negotiations with Israel in order to achieve the two-State solution.

We continue to fully support the Arab Peace Initiative, which should be an essential base for a comprehensive and lasting settlement in the Middle East.

Our expectations are equally high with regard to the new Israeli authorities. Despite repeated unanimous appeals by the international community, settlement activities continue. A wave of destruction of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem has compounded that. As the President of our Republic recalled, the settlements policy, by rendering the prospects for a Palestinian State more difficult, does not contribute to Israeli security, but on the contrary, increases the dangers. In order not to compromise the peace process, Israel must act in a strong manner now, without delay. The settlements policy must be completely frozen, in conformity with all commitments undertaken since the Road Map was adopted.

Furthermore, we support a resumption, as quickly as possible, of talks between Syria and Israel, whose success is necessary for stabilization of the region.

The elements I have just referred to will determine, in this crucial moment for the Middle East, the progress towards the necessary resumption of negotiations with a view to the creation of a viable Palestinian State, secure, independent and democratic, and living in peace side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders. Peace must be based on the principle of land for peace, Security Council resolutions, and the Arab Peace Initiative. The international community and the Council have an important role to play here. While we are convinced that peace will be negotiated between Israelis and

Palestinians first, France is determined to take or support any useful initiative.

Allow me to conclude by saying a few words on the situation in Lebanon. First, France welcomes the appointment on 24 March 2009 of a Syrian ambassador to Beirut, in conformity with the commitment undertaken by the Syrian and Lebanese heads of State. On the heels of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the opening of embassies and the appointment of the Lebanese ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic, this is an historic step in the normalization of relations between those two countries.

The French authorities also reiterated, on the occasion of the State visit of President Sleiman to Paris, their support for Lebanon and their commitment to the implementation of the Doha agreement, which has enabled the Lebanese people to resume the path of dialogue and national reconciliation. My country hopes that the legislative elections to be held on 7 June 2009 will be carried out in a climate of stability and respect for democratic norms and will facilitate the consolidation of the unity and independence of Lebanon to which we all aspire.

My country also welcomed the establishment, on 1 March 2009, of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, aimed at putting an end to impunity and ensuring that justice prevails in Lebanon. We have also recalled the importance of States continuing to cooperate with the Office of the Prosecutor, as requested in Security Council resolution 1852 (2008).

France remains fully committed to the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). In this regard, we attach special importance to the strengthening of tripartite cooperation in the field under the aegis of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon; the disarmament of militias within the framework of national dialogue; the strict implementation of the arms embargo; and the settlement of the issue of Ghajar. At some point, progress will have to be achieved on the Shaba'a farms issue. We welcome the work carried out by the Secretary-General to that end, and we invite all parties to commit themselves to a genuine diplomatic process.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing. We appreciate the statements made by the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

More than two months have passed since the unilateral ceasefires were declared by the respective parties, but the situation in Gaza continues to be a source of serious concern. We call on all parties to make every effort to achieve a durable and effective ceasefire agreement and fully implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The sustained re-opening of the crossing points and the prevention of the illicit trafficking of arms are essential ingredients for an effective ceasefire.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be very serious. Sixty-five per cent of Gazans live below the poverty line and 37 per cent live in extreme poverty. 40,000 people in Gaza remain without access to water through the public network. We must remind ourselves that there has not been much improvement in Gaza. Improved access for humanitarian relief items and the opening of crossings remain a priority concern. We strongly urge Israel to make further efforts to improve the access of goods and humanitarian workers to Gaza.

At the same time, we condemn the sporadic rocket attacks into Israeli territory around the security crossing areas. They have to be stopped immediately. They undermine the security of Israeli citizens, the efforts for reconstruction and the peace process.

We have to realize how important it is mobilize concerted international support to the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of Palestinian people. It is heartening that the Sharm el-Sheikh conference in early March succeeded in mobilizing resources of over $4 billion.

For our part, Japan pledged $200 million in assistance to the Palestinian people and will provide assistance to needy citizens in a timely manner. We also support the development of the Palestinian economy through the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative. The objective of this initiative is to help the establishment of a Palestinian State. We also make a positive contribution to the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians.

To reconstruct Gaza effectively and for the peace process to advance, Palestinian reconciliation is of utmost importance. We urge Palestinian leaders to

redouble their efforts to reconcile as soon as possible. Japan continues to support President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority in their efforts to reunify the West Bank and Gaza.

We are encouraged by the efforts of Arab leaders to create an environment conducive to the advancement of peace in the region as a whole. We are confident that the Arab League summit in Doha, Qatar, will strengthen cooperation among the countries in the region. At the same time, we hope that the incoming Israeli Government will commit itself to the two-State solution and work with the Palestinian Authority to restore the peace process.

We acknowledge that the United Nations, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, has been playing a vital role in the Palestinian territory in the areas of both humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. We would like to reiterate our appreciation for the courageous work of staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) during this difficult period. We also commend the work of the United Nations agencies in supporting the reconstruction efforts of the Palestinian Authority.

The damage and injuries incurred at UNRWA and other United Nations facilities are not acceptable, and such attacks should not be repeated. We appreciate the Secretary-General's intention to report back to the Security Council on the findings by the Board of Inquiry.

We expect a new political development on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides. It is essential for all parties to respect and to work towards the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). For that purpose, Israel must freeze settlement activities in accordance with the principles contained in the Road Map.

We firmly believe that peace can be achieved only through dialogue, political commitment and negotiation. For our part, we will continue to make efforts to have a positive influence on the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East. We also welcome the statements by the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the Palestinian Authority.

Despite the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) and the unilateral cessation of hostilities in the West Bank, a tense calm prevails in the Middle East. The humanitarian crisis brought about by the conflict has not been resolved and continues to pose a threat to the stability of the region. Now more than ever, it is imperative that all of the actors concerned reiterate their commitment to political dialogue, to the peace process and to the establishment of a Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace within secure and recognized borders.

The recent crisis in Gaza has shown once again that weapons will not solve the conflict. Only a few weeks after the partial cessation of hostilities, we note with concern that rocket attacks from Gaza into southern Israel, the most recent of which took place yesterday in Ashkelon, have continued, as have air incursions by the Israel Defense Forces into Gaza. My delegation condemns these acts of violence and once again urges all stakeholders to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law at all times.

In addition to these events, we note that the lack of substantial progress in intra-Palestinian dialogue and the delays in the formation of a new Israeli Government have led to the temporary interruption of the peace process.

We also believe that the continuation of the policy of demolitions and settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank does not bode well for the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority or for the establishment of a lasting peace. We therefore call on the parties to implement as soon as possible the provisions of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), as they contain the elements necessary for the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and renewed dialogue. We must recall here that it is only through the introduction of a monitoring mechanism that a lasting ceasefire will be possible and that an end will be put to illicit arms trafficking into Gaza Strip, which was one of the central issues that brought about the recent crisis. Here, we commend Egypt for having taken steps to facilitate the intra-Palestinian dialogue and establish the basis for an agreement on Gaza. We also commend the international community for its efforts to resolve the

humanitarian crisis and begin reconstruction efforts as soon as possible.

We should redouble our efforts to make progress on the basis of agreements achieved at Sharm el-Sheikh in early March. The outcome of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference was encouraging: it is a starting point for adopting a long-term approach to respond to the humanitarian crisis, taking account of fundamental aspects such as the permanent opening of all border crossings; support for the rebuilding of infrastructure; the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of Gaza; and the strengthening of governance. That collective effort made it possible to obtain pledges totalling nearly $4.5 billion. We trust that those pledges will be translated into concrete action to benefit the civilian population and regional stability.

Mexico is participating in the effort by making a contribution to the World Food Programme, through its Operation Lifeline Gaza, which provides food to those affected by the conflict and promotes school attendance by children. We shall also continue to make an active contribution to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which acted in an exemplary manner throughout the recent conflict.

My delegation is concerned by the fact that humanitarian work continues to be hindered, in particular in terms of access for humanitarian assistance and materials for rebuilding Gaza. In some cases, we see actions that are clear violations of international humanitarian law. Here, we recall the importance of implementing the provisions of resolution 1502 (2003) regarding the obligation of all parties involved in an armed conflict to comply fully with the rules and principles of international law applicable to them related to the protection of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and its associated personnel, in particular international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law.

We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to establish a Board of Inquiry to shed light on the attacks on United Nations facilities in Gaza; we await the findings of the Board's investigation and the identification of actions to be taken to prevent further incidents of this kind. We also call on the Government of Israel to support the ongoing investigation — undertaken at its own initiative — regarding possible violations of international humanitarian law during the military operations in Gaza. We hope also that there will be an investigation of alleged human rights violations by Hamas.

Tomorrow will mark 30 years since the signing of the historic peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. For that model to be reproduced in the region, three objectives must be attained. First, negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority should be resumed, with a firm commitment by the parties to constructive dialogue without preconditions. In the present context, meeting that objective depends on progress in the intra-Palestinian dialogue and on the will of the new Government of Israel to support the peace process. Statements to that effect made yesterday by the new Prime Minister seem to be encouraging.

Secondly, there must be a continued commitment by Israel and Lebanon to the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), and the normalization of relations between Lebanon and Syria must continue. We are pleased to note that, to date, as a result of the Doha agreement of May 2008, calm has prevailed in Lebanon in the preparations for the parliamentary elections to take place in June this year. But we deplore the incidents that took place during the commemoration of the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the tragic news of the recent assassination of Kamal Medhat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon.

Thirdly, the indirect contacts between Israel and Syria, in which Turkey has played a key role in the past, must be resumed. In particular, the endeavours of the Special Envoys appointed by the President of the United States will also make it possible to achieve progress on this matter.

In conclusion, I reaffirm my delegation's commitment to continue to support action by the Security Council and interested States with a view to attaining those objectives, while always giving precedence to the contribution that the United Nations should make, in the conviction that stability and security in the Middle East will come about as a result of dialogue and negotiation, not the use of force.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing and by welcoming the Permanent Representative of Israel and the representative of the Palestinian Authority.

The Under-Secretary-General has given us much to consider, and at the outset I would like to discuss the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The United States is deeply committed to relieving the immediate suffering of the people there. We are also determined to aggressively work for a lasting peace that provides a stable and prosperous future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Our response to the urgent needs in Gaza, however, cannot be separated from our broader long-term efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace.

To date, my Government has contributed more than $66 million to provide food, water, medicine and shelter for the people of Gaza. At the 2 March donors conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Secretary of State Clinton announced our intention to support the Palestinian Authority and Gaza recovery with up to $900 million in assistance. That pledge, designed in coordination with the Palestinian Authority and to be submitted to the United States Congress, will deliver assistance to the people of Gaza and will further the development of the West Bank.

The United States is working with President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to address critical humanitarian, budgetary, security and infrastructure development needs in Gaza. Direct budget support to the Palestinian Authority offers one of the quickest ways to meet those needs: the Palestinian Authority spends more than 50 per cent of its recurrent budget in Gaza, for instance, and Palestinian Authority employees in Gaza's hospitals and schools continue to provide essential services to the people of Gaza under often extreme conditions.

Through our assistance and support for the Palestinian Authority, we aim to foster the conditions in which a Palestinian State can be created — a State at peace with Israel and its neighbours and accountable to its people, a State of which Palestinians everywhere can be proud. That is the Palestinian State we all envisage and which we all have an obligation to help create.

We are engaging with the Government of Israel on a daily basis about the volume and range of humanitarian items and humanitarian workers entering Gaza. We encourage Israel to make it easier to bring humanitarian goods into Gaza and to ease restrictions on urgently needed items, including critical building supplies. As part of a lasting ceasefire, Gaza's border crossings should be opened to permit a robust flow of aid and commerce, with an appropriate monitoring regime joined by both the international community and the Palestinian Authority. We also share Israel's concern about the fate of Corporal Gilad Shalit and urge his immediate release.

I also wish to express our deep appreciation to President Mubarak and the Government of Egypt for their persistence in promoting a durable ceasefire in Gaza and southern Israel, and in hosting Palestinian reconciliation talks. The United States values Egypt's leadership in the region and its support for peace. We support its efforts to forge a Palestinian unity Government that can be a genuine party to peace and can realize the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations to an independent and viable State by recognizing Israel, renouncing violence and accepting previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map.

The smuggling of weapons into Gaza and continued rocket attacks by Hamas constitute a serious and immediate threat to regional peace and security, putting innocent lives at risk and threatening to set off another deadly round of violence. Working with our partners in the region and beyond, the United States is committed to moving forward quickly with new mechanisms to block this arms trafficking.

We welcome the programme of action agreed in London on 13 March by nine nations: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States. Consistent with existing Security Council resolutions, as well as with counter-terrorism and non-proliferation conventions and regimes, this initiative will strengthen the international community's ability to support a durable ceasefire. It provides a comprehensive platform for enhanced cooperation, information and intelligence sharing, diplomatic engagement and military and law enforcement activities. Participating countries will meet on a regular basis and have agreed that the initiative would be open to others that wish to join.

It is the policy of the United States to move quickly and actively to seek a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians. With Special Envoy Mitchell leading our efforts, we are engaged in determined and vigorous diplomacy. Lasting peace requires more than a ceasefire, however. We urge all parties to respect their obligations under the Road Map

and to refrain from any activities that do not help the cause of peace in the Middle East.

We have made clear to Israel that settlement activity is unhelpful, and we call on Israel to dismantle outposts created since March 2001. We also call on the Arab States, building on the Arab Peace Initiative, to reach out to Israel to demonstrate by both word and deed that Israel has a permanent and secure place in the region. The United States will engage to help support the parties as they make progress towards a comprehensive peace between Israel and all its neighbours that respects Israel's rightful place in the community of nations and includes two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

President Obama, Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice have stated their desire for principled and sustained engagement in the Middle East. As President Obama has noted, the United States intends to pursue engagement with all countries of the region, including Syria. On 7 March, United States officials travelled to Damascus to build on previous discussions in Washington, D.C. We are hopeful that Syria can play a constructive role in the region by supporting, for example, Palestinian reconciliation based on commitments undertaken by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a secure and stable Iraq, and free and fair parliamentary elections in Lebanon.

Before closing, let me make several essential points about the situation in Lebanon. Sadly, these are also related to the unremitting threat of violence. The United States condemns the attack on Monday that killed Kamal Medhat, adviser to the PLO's representative in Lebanon, and his bodyguards. We call on all parties to respect the rule of law and renounce the use of violence. My Government supports the Lebanese Government in its efforts to provide security and to ensure that the perpetrators of this attack are brought to justice.

We also remain particularly concerned about Hizbollah's continuing efforts to rearm. In Lebanon as in Gaza, arms smuggling is a continuing threat to peace and security in the region. Lebanese civilians will have real security only when Hizbollah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, Fatah al-Intifada and other militias disarm. The Government of Lebanon must be the sole military authority in that country. The United States continues to press all parties to support the conduct of free, fair and transparent parliamentary elections in Lebanon, unmarred by political violence. The shape and composition of Lebanon's next Government should be decided by the Lebanese themselves, for Lebanon and free from outside interference.

Finally, we are encouraged by the 1 March opening of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in The Hague, and we are confident that the Tribunal will bring to justice those who financed, planned and perpetrated the assassinations of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and others. The rise of the Tribunal illustrated the shared determination of Lebanon and the international community to end an era of impunity for political assassinations in Lebanon. The United States will continue to support the Tribunal, and we encourage all those committed to promoting justice in Lebanon to do so as well.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): Allow me to begin by welcoming Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and thanking him for presenting us with an analysis of the challenges that the Middle East region is presently facing. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of the Ambassador of Israel and the representative of the Palestinian Authority.

In the aftermath of the violence in Gaza, two priorities deserve our continuing attention: responding to the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of Gaza while keeping the conditions in place for the revitalized peace process to continue as soon as possible. Gaza is facing the enormous challenge of reconstruction. We recognize that there is a continuing need for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian aid and reconstruction material.

Let me underscore our appreciation for the work being undertaken by the United Nations agencies and their personnel on the ground, who continue to work in challenging circumstances. We expect all parties to act responsibly in order to facilitate humanitarian access and the work of those United Nations agencies. However, the diversion and instrumentalization of aid are not acceptable.

We were heartened by the outcome of the recent Sharm el-Sheikh conference, which helped to raise much-needed financial support for the urgent recovery and reconstruction of Gaza and sent a strong message of international solidarity with the population of Gaza. While the pledges exceeded anticipation, the

operationalization of assistance remains a challenge. In order to have a tangible impact on the daily lives of those in need, we hope to see the rapid implementation of the Palestinian National Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, under the Palestinian National Authority. It is needed not only to boost the economy, but also to help heal Palestinian society.

Croatia remains convinced that the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) remains essential in order to avoid earlier patterns of behaviour that led to the latest violence. In parallel with humanitarian assistance and recovery, it is important to secure a prolonged ceasefire. Given the precarious state of calm in Gaza, we condemn all attempts to reignite violence by launching rocket attacks on Israel amid efforts to secure such a durable ceasefire. If there is to be a credible and durable ceasefire, it is essential that the capability of Hamas and other militant groups to launch rocket attacks against Israel be put to an end. Similarly, arrangements for the sustained reopening of crossing points also need to be put in place. Resolution 1860 (2009) is clear on this.

Croatia appreciates the active and dedicated engagement of Egypt to put in place conditions for a durable ceasefire, as well as its efforts to secure intra-Palestinian reconciliation, particularly with a view to securing the long-term recovery and stability of Gaza. We regret that an early agreement to release captured Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit could not be reached.

The recent military hostilities in Gaza only underscore the need to continue to work towards a political solution and a lasting peace in the Middle East based on the two-State solution. We understand that the current period is beset by challenges, given the political uncertainties on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides. This makes it all the more important that the international community, including this Council as well as an active Quartet, remain guided by the objectives reaffirmed in resolution 1850 (2008) and encourage the continuation of negotiations and the reduction of all measures likely to erode confidence. We are encouraged by the early engagement of the new United States administration. We look forward to the forthcoming summit of the League of Arab States to advance intra-Palestinian reconciliation as a step that will advance the overall peace efforts.

On Lebanon, let me convey our satisfaction with the improved, but still fragile, political and security climate in that country. We deplore all attempts to undermine the prevailing atmosphere of calm, including this week's terrorist attack against Mr. Kamal Medhat. The June elections will be not only a key test but also an opportunity to consolidate stability and the constitutional order in Lebanon. We are encouraged by the improvements achieved in Lebanese-Syrian relations, which come at a critical time, and expect to see them translated into further tangible steps towards full normalization.

Developments on the regional front and the support of the region's leaders for peace remain a crucial part of the bigger picture and will inevitably have a bearing on efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace anchored in the two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

At the outset, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

I wish to note that the peace process in the Middle East is experiencing continual reversal. Peace is impossible as a result of Israel's illegal and inhuman practices on several levels. They include its blockades, killings, construction of settlements, land confiscations, home demolitions, erection of barriers and detention of 11,000 Palestinians, including women and children, who have been held not for thousands of days but for thousands of months.

Since mid-2007, Israeli occupying authorities have imposed a suffocating blockade on the Gaza Strip. Palestinians live under very depressing circumstances, which has been met with a very embarrassing silence on the part of the international community. Israel unleashed a war against the residents of Gaza after they had become weary as a result of hunger and the blockade. Despite everything that has transpired, the Israeli authorities are continuing their blockade, placing obstacles in the way of mediation efforts, reneging on their obligations and changing conditions. All of that is part of an effort to perpetuate the siege despite the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) and calls by the Secretary-General and many international, regional and civil society organizations.

The occupying Power has committed grave atrocities in the occupied Palestinian territories, in

particular in the Gaza Strip. Many of those violations rise to the level of war crimes and genocide under international law and international humanitarian law. That has been confirmed by numerous distinguished international personalities, including the 16 who addressed a joint letter to the Secretary-General and the members of the Security Council. Reports by Mr. Richard Falk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Territories, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have all called for investigations into the crimes committed in Gaza. In addition, the Red Cross has condemned the targeting of medical teams and the fact that they have been prevented from reaching the wounded.

All that has been borne out by eyewitness reports and the dramatic articles published in *The New York Times* and *Haaretz* on 22 March 2009, which included witness accounts, documents and information about war crimes and other acts committed in Gaza by Israeli soldiers acting on orders from high in the chain of command calling for the use of phosphorous bombs, the targeting of ambulances and defenceless civilians and the ransacking of houses. The reports also included a statement by a unit leader who deliberately killed a Palestinian woman and her two sons with an automatic rifle, as well as an account of the killing of an old woman crossing a street who posed no threat to Israel's occupying forces. The paper also included statements of how, despite claims made by the Israeli army, pilots deliberately and without warning targeted civilian houses.

It is clear from the testimony of Israeli soldiers that the orders they received essentially told them to show no concern for the lives of Palestinian civilians. An Israeli officer also stated that such orders could not have been issued by a junior field commander; instead they had to come from the highest level of the Israeli army command. One Israeli soldier is quoted as saying,

> "the staff command is responsible for issuing these orders and is trying to manipulate the facts and depict matters as isolated incidents. In fact, they go much deeper than that".

In addition, Israeli soldiers have admitted to killing hundreds of women and children who waved white flags, knowing full well that they were civilians and posed no threat to them. They too confirmed that their actions were carried out on the basis of higher orders. *Haaretz* also published that confirmed information.

The international community must put an end to the suffering of the besieged Palestinian people in Gaza. It must not allow the occupying Power to continue to hold the residents of Gaza hostage. The lifting of the siege must not be linked to any other issue, as it constitutes a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international humanitarian law, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Fourth Geneva Convention and numerous other instruments.

The perpetuation of the siege constitutes an act of blackmail of the besieged that prevents them from receiving food, medicine and shelter. The Israeli authorities must also assume responsibility for the rebuilding of Gaza, without using that as an instrument of political blackmail to the detriment of those affected and whose homes have been destroyed.

The situation in the West Bank is no less grave than that which prevails in the Gaza Strip. A different type of crime is being committed there, namely, that of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians through a systematic campaign to demolish their homes and prevent them from rebuilding and to confiscate land through the building of settlements.

That vicious campaign is focused in particular on the city of Jerusalem, as has been confirmed by a special report by the head of the European Union mission in East Jerusalem that was published in *The Guardian*. It describes the process by which Israel demolishes Arab homes and prevents their inhabitants from rebuilding or even gaining access to their property. That serves not only to hamper the peace process; it also obliterates any chance for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

We reiterate that the unbalanced and biased view of some of the Council's members has only served to encourage Israel's settlement activities. Moreover, the Israeli Peace Now movement, which monitors settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, has stated that Israeli authorities plan to build more than 733,000 housing units in the West Bank. Of those, 15,000 have already been approved. If the remaining units are also approved, the total number of settlers would be double what it is now.

In addition, Israeli authorities have announced that 1,700 homes were demolished in East Jerusalem this year alone. That means the deliberate displacement of 17,000 civilians. In addition, 35 outposts have been established in other areas. Several houses have also been demolished in the historic Selwan district of East Jerusalem to build a city park, displacing 500 Palestinian civilians. That runs counter to the claims of the Israeli authorities, which seek to portray what is happening in Jerusalem as an isolated act committed by extremist groupings while the truth is that the Israeli Government is responsible for the targeting and Judaization of the Old City of Jerusalem in violation of international law, Security Council resolutions and its obligations under the Road Map.

The Israeli Government's practices affirm that Israel's only policy and only firm position for the past six decades have been that it does not seek peace and continues to expand settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and attempts to terrorize and humiliate the Palestinian people and bring them to their knees. These practices show that those who rule Israel are no more than a gang of criminals and that the organizations and States of the international community must make their position clear on the crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. If they fail to do so, they should be considered accomplices to these crimes and co-conspirators against the occupied Palestinian people.

I now resume my duties as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by expressing my appreciation for the excellent and valuable briefing presented by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, which the Council is debating today in order to provide the international impetus necessary to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on ending Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories since 1967 and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State.

This debate takes place at a critical juncture when we are plagued by uncertainty about the future of peace on the Palestinian track and the prospects for realizing the two-State solution, which the Security Council has often called for and firmly established through successive resolutions, most recently resolution 1850 (2008), and at a time when the occupying Power persists in its practices, particularly the unlawful settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the continuing siege of the Gaza Strip, and the deprivation of its civilian population of the means of living a decent human life.

The situation in the entire occupied Palestinian territory remains extremely volatile, and the inability of the international community to intervene to protect the Palestinians under occupation exacerbates the gravity of the situation. The Palestinian civilian population of the Gaza Strip is struggling to cope with the humanitarian disaster inflicted upon it by Israeli military aggression and the 20-month siege, while the Palestinian population in the West Bank also continues to suffer as a result of Israel's other grave violations of international law and international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. The occupying Power continues to disregard its Road Map obligations to freeze settlement activities and insists on defying the international community's repeated calls to cease its illegal construction and expansion of settlements and its construction of the illegitimate separation wall throughout the West Bank, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. The construction of this wall seeks to alter the city's legal status, political character and demographic composition before the beginning of final status negotiations.

The danger of such colonization is not limited to mere violations of international law, United Nations resolutions and Israeli commitments under the Road Map; it also threatens to inflame tension and violence, particularly in view of the proximity of the confiscated Palestinian land in the Arab Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Bustan neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem to the Islamic holy places near there, in addition to the documented danger of the violence of settlers who have targeted the unarmed Palestinian population under the protection of occupation forces.

Also in this connection, the occupying Power uses military force to deny the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem their legitimate right to celebrate their city as the 2009 Capital of Arab Culture, and continues to pursue illegal excavations inside and around the city, threatening the sanctity of the holy Islamic and Christian sites and violating their status as universal heritage sites. The edifice of Al-Aqsa mosque

is endangered as a result of the illegitimate excavations taking place in Bab al-Maghariba, Salwan and Ma'man Allah, the historic Islamic cemetery, with a view to Judaizing the holy city and damaging the unity of the West Bank territories by dissecting it into isolated cantons, thereby undermining the prospects for achieving the two-State solution and fundamentally threatening regional peace and security.

The ongoing severe humanitarian crisis resulting from the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip, the lack of a lasting ceasefire and the failure to maintain a calm and sustained opening of the crossing points on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, as reiterated in resolution 1860 (2009), increases the gravity of the situation. Egypt seeks the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and resolution ES-10/18 adopted at the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, and has intensified its efforts and contacts to establish calm, achieve a durable ceasefire and open the Gaza crossing points, together with reaching an agreement for the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

Egypt is also redoubling its efforts to achieve Palestinian national reconciliation in order to form a new Palestinian unity government under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, based on the Palestine Liberation Organization commitments in favour of the peace process, and to open the way for the immediate reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, which, as resolution 1860 (2009) stressed, is an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 and on which the future Palestinian State should be established.

In this connection, Egypt, which hosted the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza early this month, renews its call for Israel to ensure the immediate, unconditional and sustained reopening of its crossing points with the Gaza Strip in order to allow for the movement of people, goods and reconstruction materials into Gaza, put an end to the continuously escalating humanitarian crisis, and rebuild what was destroyed.

Undoubtedly, if justice is to be achieved, the results of inquiries into the violations committed by Israel during the recent military operations against the Gaza Strip must be handled competently. In this context, we look forward to the results of the investigation by the Board of Inquiry that was dispatched by the Secretary-General to the Gaza Strip to probe incidents of death or injury among United Nations personnel or of damage to United Nations premises during the Israeli aggression. We also look forward to the results of the investigations of these incidents by the committee established by the Human Rights Council for that purpose as well as that of the international fact-finding mission set up by the League of Arab States. There is no doubt that these investigations will bring the full truth to light and clarify the events that occurred in violation of international law and international humanitarian law. As a result, the need to effectively address these incidents will be imposed upon the international community, and the Security Council in particular.

In the framework of addressing the conflict in the Middle East, we cannot ignore or overlook the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) concerning Lebanon. Egypt is gravely concerned about the failure to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) as a result of Israel's continuing occupation of the Lebanese part of the village of Ghajar, its non-cooperation with the Secretary-General's attempts to settle the situation in the area of Shaba'a farms, and its persistent violations of Lebanese airspace and territorial waters. This behaviour has raised tensions that the Security Council has to address as part of its efforts to achieve stability in the Middle East.

The international community has clear obligations regarding the maintenance of peace and security in the Middle East. The obligation to respect and to ensure respect for international law and international humanitarian law in all circumstances cannot be shirked. The situation in the occupied Arab territories must not be an exception. Egypt believes that the Security Council must intensify its efforts to address the grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory in all its aspects so as to compel the occupying Power to end its violations and to respect its commitments under international law and the resolutions adopted by the Council, as this is the only true way to achieve an environment conducive to real peace.

Egypt also appreciates the effective way in which the United States, under its new Administration, is addressing the questions of peace in the Middle East and a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue based on the two-State solution, the principle of land for

peace, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008) and the Arab Peace Initiative, which constitute a comprehensive framework for a definitive solution. That would allow a return to the path of peace and lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and an end to the Israeli occupation of Syrian and Lebanese territories. We look forward to the success of those efforts towards a comprehensive settlement.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing.

There are so many war crimes against Gaza and its residents for which Israel is responsible. The irrefutable evidence includes the high number of civilian casualties, targeted hospitals, destroyed schools and property, and the recent testimony of Israeli soldiers who committed atrocities in that war, documented reports of which have been issued by several bodies and non-governmental organizations, as Mr. Pascoe mentioned. I shall return to that topic later.

All those actions are grave violations of international humanitarian law — the rules that govern conduct during war and its outcome, including occupation. Worse still is the fact that Israel has essentially violated the provisions of international law, which governs the conditions for the use of force, always under the pretext that the United Nations Charter, specifically Article 51, gives Member States the right to self-defence in the case of armed aggression until the Security Council takes the measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Since Article 51 is an exception to the general rule provided by Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter, which prohibits the threat or use of force, we must interpret Article 51 in the narrowest sense. Contrary to that, throughout its history Israel has tried to cover up its aggressive acts by suggesting that Article 51 justifies them.

Allow me to recall how, in the past several years, every time that the security situation has deteriorated in Gaza, Israel has flooded the Council with a series of letters, most recently at the beginning of this month, in which it claims the right to exercise self-defence. It is true that Israel withdrew its troops from the Gaza Strip in 2005, but it has maintained complete control over all its land and sea boundaries and airspace. Thus, from the standpoint of international law, Gaza has remained an occupied land.

Needless to say, the right to self-defence, which Israel invokes to justify its use of force, contradicts the reality of the occupation. That was the opinion of the International Court of Justice in the case on the status of the separation wall. The Court responded to Israel's claim of the right of self-defence by saying that the right cannot also cover threats originating within, rather than outside, the areas under its control.

The right to self-defence also requires the existence of necessity and parity. Those two conditions have never been fulfilled whenever Israel has used force, as noted by the Secretary-General, who has repeatedly condemned Israel's excessive use of force. In fact, international humanitarian law governs all occupied areas. That is the principle established by international law and set out in the Hague Conventions and the Fourth Geneva Convention. When Israel invokes the right to self-defence in Gaza and Lebanon it is in fact engaging in "self-help" by cherrypicking its own rights. Confusing those two principles will only undermine the principle that created the need for an Organization such as the United Nations and, prior to that, the League of Nations. It takes us back to a world controlled by the law of the jungle and the logic of force.

Returning to international humanitarian law, which must govern the relationship between Israel and the areas that it occupies, the principles of that law require the occupying Power to ensure the safety of the population of those areas and the protection of their property.

After briefly enumerating various frequent violations by Israel in that regard, I shall only mention a few examples of the testimony of Israeli soldiers who were invited to Oranim College in Kiryat Tivon to evaluate their experiences in the war in Gaza. As has been mentioned, on 20 March 2009, the Israel newspaper *Haaretz* published a complete transcript of that testimony. For example, one soldier stated that instructions to his unit were, upon entering any house, to start shooting indiscriminately against anyone on the grounds that anyone remaining in Gaza was a terrorist. However, the residents of Gaza were never able to leave because of the blockade. Another soldier reported

how the soldiers wantonly destroyed property. Other soldiers reported how snipers shot at civilians, women and children, without any qualms.

Indeed, we have heard and read that the Israeli army intends to investigate some of those practices, but that does not alter the fact that this is a sample of the conduct of soldiers in an army that the Israeli Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, after reviewing those testimonies, still described as "the most moral army in the world". As to the morality of that army's members, I refer to an article by Uri Blau, also published in *Haaretz* on 20 March 2009, in which he described certain drawings and logos that the soldiers had chosen to put on their T-shirts after graduating from training courses or returning from combat duty. Those included an image of a child as a target in the sight of a gun with the logo "The smaller they are — the harder it is", or drawing of a pregnant woman as a target in the sight of a gun with the logo "One shot — two kills" or the image of an Israeli soldier blowing up a mosque or a Palestinian woman weeping at a cemetery. This is merely a small sample of the morality that Mr. Barak talks about.

While Israel was spreading destruction in Gaza, it was also continuing to build the racist separation wall and intensifying settlement activities in the West Bank. As soon as military operations ceased in Gaza, tractors and bulldozers returned to destroying Palestinian houses in occupied Jerusalem in a clear policy aimed at completing the Judaization of the city, and removing its original inhabitants. This is another form of ethnic cleansing carried out by Israel since its establishment.

Another aspect of this policy is the fact that Israel has prevented Palestinians from celebrating Jerusalem as a culture capital for the Arab world. It complements the following statement made by Mr. Michel Sleiman, President of Lebanon, during the debate on a culture of peace in the General Assembly last November:

> "Therefore, Jerusalem, the city of peace, where believers in the monotheistic religions come together, would not realize its historic mission unless the injustice imposed on its sons and on the Palestinian people as a whole is redressed and the occupation is ended." (*A/63/PV.46, p. 16*)

In Lebanon, while my Government reaffirms its commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), Israel continues to procrastinate and to avoid carrying out its obligations under that resolution. It continues to occupy parts of southern Lebanon; to commit daily violations of Lebanese airspace, always under the pretext of self-defence — in yet another example of its misinterpretation of Article 51 of the Charter — and refuse to provide its maps for the cluster bomb strikes that it carried out during its 2006 aggression. The Council knows full well that Israel has not responded to the request of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon concerning a withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Ghajar area. With regard to the Shaba'a farms and the Kafr Shuba Hills, we appeal to the Secretary-General to intensify diplomatic efforts to find a solution that will ensure an Israeli withdrawal from these areas.

In closing, we ask only that the Council ensure the full implementation of its resolutions concerning Lebanon, beginning with resolution 1701 (2006). We ask only that the Council ensure the full implementation of its resolutions concerning the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict so that a comprehensive and just solution to this conflict can be found. We have no doubt that the Council is fully aware that every day that the implementation of its resolutions is delayed will not only undermine its credibility, but also increase the risk of crises in our region and the threat to international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.35 p.m.

Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6100th meeting

Wednesday, 25 March 2009, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Dabbashi	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Ebner
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Mr. Huang Hongjiang
	Costa Rica	Mr. Guillermet
	Croatia	Ms. Čačić
	France	Ms. Lecoq
	Japan	Mr. Okuda
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Turkey	Mr. Dizdar
	Uganda	Mr. Kamahungye
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Bentall
	United States of America	Ms. Germain
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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09-28062 (E)

The meeting resumed at 3.15 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to remind all speakers, as indicated this morning, to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Moreno Fernández (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the Security Council on behalf of the 118 members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In compliance with your request, Mr. President, I shall deliver an abridged version of the statement prepared by the Movement, which will be circulated in its entirety in the Council Chamber.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian territory in breach of international law and United Nations resolutions. In that regard, the Movement condemns in the strongest terms the recent Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, which resulted in the death of more than 1,400 Palestinians, including hundreds of children and women, the injury of more than 5,500 Palestinians and widespread displacement, making thousands of Palestinian families homeless and deepening the suffering and fear that overwhelm the population.

The Non-Aligned Movement also condemns Israel's wanton destruction of thousands of Palestinian homes and businesses, vital civilian infrastructure and United Nations facilities, including several schools where frightened Palestinian families had sought refuge but were nonetheless attacked by the Israeli occupying forces. The Movement calls upon Israel to immediately cease its military aggression against the Palestinian people and stresses the importance of attaining a permanent and lasting ceasefire, beginning in the Gaza Strip and extending to the West Bank. The Movement also expresses its support for Egypt's efforts in that regard.

We reiterate our condemnation of Israel's inhumane and unlawful closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the virtual imprisonment of the entire Palestinian civilian population. The Movement expresses its serious concern about the grave deterioration of socio-economic conditions and the deepening humanitarian crisis as a result of the blockade, which has caused increased and widespread privation, poverty and hardship, in addition to the vast trauma and suffering inflicted by the military aggression.

The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel cease such illegal practices against the Palestinian people and put a permanent end to its illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip by allowing the immediate and sustained opening of all Gaza border crossings needed to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and to meet the urgent reconstruction and economic recovery needs of the Palestinian people.

The Movement reminds the international community, including the Security Council, of its responsibility to guarantee an in-depth investigation of all the crimes and violations committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip and to ensure that serious follow-up efforts are made to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes answer for them. Israel's impunity and its blatant disregard for and defiance of the law must come to an end. We await the report of the Board of Inquiry dispatched to Gaza by the Secretary-General. We call for immediate action to follow up the findings of the Board's investigation and for the immediate dispatch of the fact-finding mission called for by the Human Rights Council as recently called for in Geneva by the non-aligned countries.

The Movement reiterates its strong condemnation of Israel's continuing intensive campaign of building settlements throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular in and around occupied East Jerusalem. Such Israeli policies and measures constitute grave breaches of international law and flagrant defiance of United Nations resolutions and the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. We stress the incompatibility of negotiations on the peace process with such unlawful colonization activities, which are clearly aimed at the illegal acquisition and de facto annexation of more Palestinian land and at forcibly imposing a unilateral solution. The Movement emphasizes that the illegal Israeli colonization campaign in its entirety is gravely undermining the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the occupied Palestinian territory and jeopardizing the prospects for physically achieving the solution of two States living in peace.

The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel immediately cease all of its colonization activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and reaffirms that those unlawful measures cannot alter the terms of reference of the peace process nor negate the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Movement also demands that the international community take urgent action to compel the occupying Power to abide by all of its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, United Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion and its obligations under the road map.

The Government of Lebanon has continuously endeavoured to stabilize the situation in its territory following Israel's brutal aggression and serious violations of its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its satisfaction with the steps taken by the Lebanese Government to implement resolution 1701 (2006), including the deployment of its armed forces along the northern and eastern borders of Lebanon to ensure security and stability on the borders.

The Movement remains deeply concerned about Israel's ongoing air and land violations of the Blue Line in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). We strongly urge Israel to end the occupation of the northern part of Ghajar village, north of the Blue Line, and refrain from any violation of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701 (2006), as well as any provocation of the Lebanese armed forces or the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The Movement also calls for the prompt settlement of the question of the Shaba'a farms, in full respect for Lebanese territorial integrity, as stipulated in resolution 1701 (2006). We urge all parties to cooperate in protecting Lebanon's sovereign rights in that area and we note the important efforts made by the Secretary-General in that regard.

The Movement is fully aware of the enormous challenge facing Lebanon as a result of the 1.2 million cluster bombs launched by Israel during its aerial attack on the country. The Movement once again condemns the use of such weapons by Israel and deplores the resulting death toll. The Non-Aligned Movement strongly urges Israel to provide the exact location of explosives planted on Lebanese territory, as well as maps of the location of the landmines planted during its occupation of southern Lebanon.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, that purport to alter the legal, physical or demographic character or institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, including efforts to impose its jurisdiction and administration there, are null, void and have no legal effect. We also reaffirm that all of those measures, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, constitute violations of international law, international agreements and the United Nations Charter and its resolutions, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), as well as the Fourth Geneva Convention. They are also in defiance of the international community. The Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the Occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

At this critical period in the Middle East, particularly with regard to the long and tragic question of Palestine, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its intention to continue to lend its support and actively contribute in every possible way to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express my delegation's pleasure at seeing you, Sir, personally presiding over the Security Council this month. We are confident that having the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in this prominent position will help promote the agenda and efforts of the international community to reach viable solutions to the problems of today, in particular with regard to the Middle East and Africa. We also express our great appreciation for the efforts of the Permanent Representative of Japan and the members of his delegation throughout the previous month. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing earlier.

The United Nations can no longer address the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine as if it were business as usual. The inability of the Security Council to carry out its basic duties cannot be allowed

to produce disastrous results for our region and its peoples, namely, aggression, colonization, continued Israeli occupation and suffering. The United Nations in general and the Security Council in particular are therefore called upon to rise to the level of the purposes and principles of the Charter by trying to implement at least some of the hundreds of resolutions and decisions adopted in this international Organization since its inception to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, stop its violations of human rights there and halt its practices that contravene international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. That is the most important thing as we discuss the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East in the Security Council. That is at the heart of the matter. We should not be sidetracked by the representative of Israel as we discuss an issue that has been before the Council for decades.

Arab States endeavoured to establish peace at the Beirut Summit of 2002 and at the recently held 2008 summit in Damascus. They have also reiterated the need to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Meanwhile, instead of reaching out to the Arab hand outstretched in peace, Israel responded by attacking the West Bank and carrying out the Jenin and Nablus massacres, enforcing a blockade on the defenceless Palestinian people, and by specializing in killing women and children, desecrating places of worship, changing the character of Jerusalem and Judaizing it, carrying out a scorched-earth policy and collective punishment and mass arrests and building settlements and constructing the racist separation wall on occupied Palestinian lands. That is Israel's record with regard to the item now under consideration, which is the situation in the Middle East.

Not satisfied with these cumulative, provocative violations, Israel carried out its brutal aggression against Lebanon in the summer of 2006 and another aggression against Gaza recently. This entailed war crimes and crimes against humanity, which, as the Council knows, outraged international public opinion. International opinion now demands with unprecedented insistence that the Israeli perpetrators of these crimes be put on trial.

Recently, 16 prominent international personalities, including senior judges and human rights advocates, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ms. Mary Robinson and Justice Richard Goldstone, sent a letter to the Secretary-General in which they called for an immediate, independent international inquiry into Israel's violations of international law during its recent aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Richard Falk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, described this aggression as a war crime. In this context, our delegation will follow the situation carefully, as the Secretary-General carries out his commitment to forward to the Security Council the findings of the Board of Inquiry dispatched to Gaza, headed by Ian Martin, as soon as possible.

We must not overlook the article that *The Guardian* published setting out the first-hand testimony of Israeli soldiers and officers who participated in the aggression against Gaza, soldiers and officers who targeted Palestinian ambulances and medical relief workers, and who killed 47 among them.

Nor must we overlook the testimony of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. She spoke of a young Palestinian boy, not even 12 years old, who was used by the Israeli army in Gaza as a human shield. They placed him in front of an Israeli tank to protect the tank from Palestinians who were trying to defend themselves. The outcome was that the Israelis themselves shot 70 bullets into the body of this young Palestinian boy.

Israel's continued disregard for the Security Council and its continued waste of the Council's time would astonish even forerunners of the theatre of the absurd, such as Kafka and Kierkegaard, for those who are interested in such matters. It is now time for this Council to put an end to Israel's absurdist acts before this esteemed Council. The question that remains is this: If the Arab hand outstretched in peace does not meet a hand outstretched from the other side, what reason is there to keep this Arab hand outstretched in peace? Would it please the international community to see the peace process collapse and its foundations falter?

The continued occupation of Arab land in Palestine, the intensified settlement and colonization activities in the Syrian Golan and in Palestine and

Israel's persistence in occupying Lebanese territories and in refusing to abide by legitimate international resolutions in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East have all led to an escalation of tensions, an absence of stability and security in the region and a situation that is deteriorating in all its aspects. The international community, in particular the Security Council, is called upon to hold Israel's leaders accountable for their repeated crimes, which are legally defined as war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide. What Israel is doing to Palestinians is the true holocaust.

Despite Israel's desperate attempts to justify its aggression against Gaza, what it is doing now in the West Bank and Jerusalem reveals its true intentions towards the Palestinian people. Israel is not content with its racist policies and its practices of coercion. It has escalated its brutal attacks against the residents of Jerusalem who live close to the Al-Aqsa mosque, demolishing their homes and displacing them in an attempt to breach the sanctity and diminish the significance of the Al-Aqsa mosque and to Judaize the city of Jerusalem. Israel's decision to demolish 88 homes in the village of Silwan near the Al-Aqsa mosque and its continued excavations under the mosque are nothing but an attempt to carry out a preconceived plan to take control of the mosque and demolish it. They are deceiving themselves when they think in such a manner.

An even more repugnant and surreal manifestation of the conduct of the Israeli occupation authorities is the fact that these authorities impose a fine of $20,000 on any Palestinian whose home these authorities demolish. Their justification is that this money is to cover the expenses of the demolition. What does the Council think of that? Israel is thus asking the Palestinians to pay the price of the bullets it will use to shoot them. How surreal, how sadistic this is.

It is also strange that the Israeli Government has issued a decision preventing any Palestinian cultural activity in Jerusalem, which by an Arab decision was declared the Arab cultural capital. In parallel, Israel continues its settlement activities in the occupied Arab territories and the construction of the racist separation wall in blatant violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Today is also the sixth anniversary of the assassination of American peace activist Rachel Corrie, who was run over by an Israeli bulldozer because she opposed the demolition of Palestinian homes to build the separation wall.

Most of the world's countries and every United Nations body have adopted clear positions condemning Israeli settlement activities, which impede the establishment of peace, are in contradiction to the pledges made at Annapolis, constitute a genuine obstacle to peace and lead to an escalation of tensions in the region.

Syria reaffirms its steadfast and continuous support for the rights of the Palestinian people to regain their occupied land and establish their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. We also reiterate the need for an immediate end to the oppressive blockade against the Palestinian people in Gaza, for the reopening of all crossings, for the reconstruction of Gaza and for international guarantees to prevent Israel from demolishing again the facilities and infrastructure that are to be rebuilt.

In order to demonstrate its solidarity with the Palestinian people, Syria took part in the Sharm el-Sheikh conference and has participated in the international efforts to rebuild Gaza. Syria reaffirms the need to restore Palestinian national unity through a national dialogue so as to strengthen the Palestinian negotiating position and the resolve of its people. As Chair of the Arab summit, Syria is striving to achieve that unity.

Israel continues to refuse to return occupied Golan to Syria, and to abide by legitimate international resolutions, especially resolution 497 (1981). Israeli actions in the occupied Syrian Golan have exceeded every legal and moral boundary. It has pursued its policy of terrorizing and suppressing Syrian citizens of the Golan, arresting them and placing them in detention centres in conditions that jeopardize their lives. In that connection, I would like in particular to mention our national Bashir Al-Muqt. My Government has appealed to the Secretary-General and the Red Cross to save his life. In that regard, we appeal to the United Nations and the Security Council to pressure Israel to release Syrian captives, including journalist Atta Farhat, who was arrested by Israel because of his nationalist journalistic work, given a show trial and sentenced to three years in prison.

Israeli occupying authorities continue to expropriate land and to expand their illegitimate and illegal settlements in the Syrian Golan. With the

approval of the occupation Government, the so-called Golan Regional Council on settlements decided to begin the construction of new housing on 40 dunums of land near the Israeli settlement of Aniam, which was established on the ruins of the Syrian village of Al-Tibah. Representatives from Israeli parties in the settlement of Qatzrin, which was built on the ruins of the Syrian village of Kasreen, signed a joint cooperation agreement to coordinate their efforts to oppose any Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. The Israeli army has also recently carried out massive military exercises in the occupied Golan, employing all sorts of land, naval and air weaponry.

I would like to remind the Council that the number of victims of Israeli landmines in the occupied Syrian Golan stands at 531, including 202 fatalities, most of whom were children. That is in addition to the 329 injured persons with permanent multiple disabilities.

Israel continues to refuse to allow the resumption of family visits by Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan through the Quneitra crossing point. My country has sent letters in that regard to the Secretary-General, the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly and governmental and non-governmental organizations, calling for their intervention to immediately resolve this urgent humanitarian issue. We have yet to see any success in the efforts of those parties to support international humanitarian law and human rights law.

In conclusion, Syria has made the strategic choice of a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the well-known terms of reference for peace, including resolutions of international legitimacy. By definition, that entails the return of all occupied Arab territories, including occupied Syrian Golan, a return to the lines of 4 June 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital. The continuation of the occupation is a contradiction of peace. By definition, too, that requires mobilizing all possible means to put an end to it.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Palouš (Czech Republic): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries of Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this statement.

The European Union welcomed the cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip. Since then, it has been using every opportunity to call on all parties to make the current ceasefire permanent through the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). Noting the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the issues which should be addressed without any delay include a sustained halt to rocket launches towards Israel, the urgent opening of the Gaza crossings on a regular and predictable basis, and an effective mechanism to prevent arms and ammunition smuggling into the Gaza Strip.

The European Union deeply deplores the loss of life during this conflict, particularly the civilian casualties. We continue to remind all parties to the conflict to fully respect human rights and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. The European Union will closely follow investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law.

The European Union is gravely concerned by the humanitarian situation on the ground and calls for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. Only the immediate and unconditional reopening of all crossings for the passage of humanitarian aid will reverse the current humanitarian deterioration.

The European Union has on several occasions declared its readiness not only to step up its already substantial emergency aid contribution, but also to work towards the rehabilitation, reconstruction, sustainable economic recovery and future economic development of the Gaza Strip. The European Union welcomed the Palestinian Authority's plan for the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza. We believe that the recent conference in Sharm el-Sheikh was a success, both in raising the necessary funds for reconstruction and economic development and — maybe even more importantly — in sending a clear signal in support of the Palestinian National Authority.

The European Union is the largest donor. The European Commission provided €554 million in 2009, in addition to the bilateral contributions of EU member States. The EU is determined to play a substantial role,

alongside the United States and Arab countries, in alleviating the dire situation in Gaza. The European Union will continue to support the Palestinian economy as a whole. While focusing our attention on Gaza, we must not forget to address the needs in the West Bank, since both territories constitute the pillars of a future Palestinian State that is viable, contiguous and democratic, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Unhindered passage of humanitarian aid, people and commercial goods must be allowed in order to ensure recovery and reconstruction and provide hope for a better future. The European Union has constantly pushed for the sustained reopening of Gaza's borders on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and is prepared to reactivate, and possibly extend, its assistance in the management of Gaza's borders. Another essential prerequisite for the sustainable recovery and development of Palestinian society, both in Gaza and in the West Bank, is intra-Palestinian reconciliation. The European Union welcomes the reconciliation process launched at the meeting of all Palestinian factions, held in Cairo on 26 February, and strongly encourages reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas. In this respect, we commend Egypt and the Arab League partners for their mediation efforts.

We are in a transition period waiting for new Israeli and interim Palestinian Governments to be formed. But no matter what their composition, the European Union clearly expects their representatives to honour obligations entered into by their predecessors.

The European Union reiterates its condemnation of the continuing firing of rockets into southern Israel. The European Union also condemns Israel's planned settlement activities. The European Union urgently calls on Israel to reconsider the planned construction of settlements, which would be in violation of international law and would run counter to the Road Map and commitments made by Israel to the Palestinians and the international community in Annapolis in November 2007.

The European Union has consistently made clear that there can be no sustainable peace in the Middle East without the creation of a viable Palestinian State. Continued settlement activity severely damages that prospect. The European Union is also deeply concerned by the issuing of eviction notices in East Jerusalem, which, combined with the increase in settlement activities, further threatens the chances of peace. We call on Israel to suspend these eviction notices immediately.

The European Union strongly supports a two-State solution as the only realistic option to meet the expectations of both peoples to live in peace and security alongside each other. This perspective was also reaffirmed at the first meeting of the Middle East Quartet with the participation of the new United States Administration on the margins of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference.

However, there is no solidified truce around Gaza at this stage. We continue to support Egyptian efforts towards this goal and encourage all parties to come to an agreement as soon as possible. The European Union is convinced that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in Gaza or elsewhere. Peace in the Middle East requires a comprehensive solution through a lasting and just settlement of the conflict on all its tracks, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and previous agreements reached between the parties. We consider the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 to be a solid and appropriate basis for achieving stability, peace and security in the region. The European Union stands ready to actively work towards that goal.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Brazil welcomes the convening of this timely debate, an initiative that speaks to Libya's commitment to the efforts by the United Nations to bring peace to the Middle East. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing.

A little more than two months after the conflict in Gaza and a few weeks after the donor conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, this debate should reinforce the resolve of the international community not only to speed up reconstruction of the war-torn Gaza Strip, but also to advance the peace process as a whole. It is necessary to take stock of the situation and to devise a common strategy that allows the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State at a very early date, living side by side in peace and security with Israel within internationally recognized borders.

This goal requires the resumption of negotiations between the parties in good faith. Brazil welcomes the Palestinian political forces' willingness to form a reconciliation government. We recognize the role of Egypt in bringing about those developments. The expansion of settlements by Israel and the frequent use of violence — serious obstacles to the two-State solution — should be immediately stopped. More than ever, persuasion from the international community is an essential ingredient of the achievement of peace.

Brazil firmly believes that all actors in the region that are prepared to act constructively should be given a chance to participate in the peace process. By the same token, bringing developing countries from outside the region to the discussions would also add fresh ideas to the talks. Brazil attended the Annapolis Conference and encourages the holding of a follow-up conference as a matter of urgency.

We expect that the new government being formed in Israel will not only fulfil the international commitments already in place, but also engage fully in the peace process.

At this juncture, it is very important to support the Palestinian Authority and to help it strengthen its institutions and its ability to make a difference in the everyday lives of the Palestinian population.

With respect to Gaza, all parties must fully implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), without preconditions.

The reality on the ground calls for immediate action. That includes the permanent reopening of all crossings into Gaza, so that the flow of humanitarian aid and of regular trade can be normalized. On the Palestinian side, violence against Israeli civilians, including the launching of rockets, must cease.

In the recent times of heightened tension, Brazil has continued and even increased its cooperation efforts with the Palestinian Authority. We emphasize the need to bring a clear and consistent improvement to the daily lives of the people of Palestine. During his visit to the region during the conflict, Foreign Minister Celso Amorim delivered, on behalf of the Brazilian Government and people, 14 tons of food and medicine to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

That was not an isolated event. In the donor conferences held in Stockholm and Paris, Brazil donated a total of $10.5 million. Our contribution in Paris was the largest Brazil has ever made and one of the highest among non-Islamic developing countries. These resources are now being employed in a wide range of projects on the ground that are meant to have a direct positive impact on the local population: the construction of schools, the establishment of fish farms and the management of communal lands, to mention just a few. Together with our partners India and South Africa in the framework of the IBSA Fund, we pledged an additional $3 million over three years and are now pursuing the construction of a sports centre in Ramallah scheduled to start in April.

In Sharm el-Sheikh, Foreign Minister Amorim announced the donation of a further $10 million for the reconstruction of Gaza. On that occasion, IBSA also announced its cooperation for the reconstruction of Gaza. Next April, a high-level Brazilian delegation will visit the West Bank to hold talks with the Palestinian authorities on cooperation in the area of public policy.

In cooperation with the Department of Public Information, Brazil will host the 2009 International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East in Rio de Janeiro next July. We hope that the event can make a contribution to the peace process through dialogue between the parties, including their civil societies.

Let me say a few words about Lebanon, a country with which Brazil also has strong ties. The steady implementation of the Doha agreement and the scheduling of legislative elections for next June are encouraging developments. The Lebanese people will once again be able to solve problems in a democratic and peaceful way. We note with appreciation the calm situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, but we appeal to all parties to implement in full resolution 1701 (2006).

By the end of March, the second South America-Arab Countries Summit will take place in Qatar. We are confident that it will help to further identify opportunities to enhance relations and cooperation between the two regions.

In concluding, I would say that, in recent months there have been tragic setbacks in the Middle East. The situation in Gaza remains intolerable. The Council and the international community as a whole must live up to their responsibilities. It is no longer the time for a peace process; it is high time for peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to express my great pleasure at seeing the brother country of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya at the helm of the Security Council as the Council is addressing the situation in the Middle East — something that has been on the agenda of the Organization since its creation. I must commend the professionalism and effectiveness displayed by the Japanese presidency last month. I also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing and report on developments in the Palestinian situation.

After the Israeli aggression against Gaza, the entire world has been able to see the atrocities committed against Palestinians and their property. Palestinians have been orphaned and dispersed and their homes destroyed. That has happened in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, as stated recently by the Special Rapporteur for human rights in the Palestinian territories. The aggression has halted, but the Palestinian people are still awaiting the opening of border crossings, the lifting of the siege, reconstruction, and a return to normal life with all its components.

In solidarity with the Palestinian people in these trials, His Majesty the King of Morocco, during the first week of aggression, ordered that food and medical supplies be provided and medical teams sent to lend support to Palestinians in hospitals. Contributions for reconstruction have also been made by the Moroccan people, including for the reconstruction of Gaza and a wing of the Al-Quds Hospital. Fifteen million dollars has been committed by His Majesty for the reconstruction effort.

The statements made by Israel on returning to negotiations do not absolve it of its crimes and its collective punishment, its intensified settlement activities, and its occupation of the Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The policy of demographic change and the Judaization of East Jerusalem is contrary to resolutions of international legitimacy, the Road Map and the principle of land for peace. The destruction of a historic cemetery, with a museum to be built in its place, is a violation of Palestinian rights and a desecration of holy places as defined by UNESCO. His Majesty the King, as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, has addressed a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to the permanent members of the Security Council, in which he condemned the intentions of the Israeli authorities against the inhabitants of al-Bustan neighbourhood near Silway, near Al-Aqsa Mosque, which was built before the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem. His Majesty the King urged that those practices be abandoned and that the pursuit of peace and the rule of international law prevail.

Morocco supports a return to the negotiating table and wishes to encourage an environment conducive to that and to reunifying Palestinian factions on the basis of intra-Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation, including the consolidation of the Arab and Palestinian positions in all international forums. We also urge that all good offices continue to be deployed, in particular the good offices of our Egyptian brothers, in order to achieve that goal.

My country states that it is important that an international process fostering the Arab Peace Initiative commence. The Arab Peace Initiative is indeed an essential and realistic basis for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Initiative is based on the Arab strategic choice of peace, the principle of land for peace, the creation of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, and respect by Israel of its international and regional agreements.

Lastly, on behalf of Morocco, I wish to state once again our full and continued support for the Palestinian people's right to an independent viable State of their own, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and also our support for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict so that there might be peace and stability for all the peoples of the region, to make cooperation and recovery possible.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call next on the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar): Allow me at the outset to salute you, Mr. President, and congratulate you on your appointment as Permanent Representative of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations in New York. I wish to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and to commend you for all your efforts and endeavours on this item: the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I

would also like to thank Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on behalf of the Secretary-General.

This is the first time that the Security Council is holding an open debate since the end of what the Israeli occupation forces dubbed "Operation Cast Lead" in the occupied Gaza Strip. It is needless to remind the Council of the deaths, destruction and tragedies that resulted from that three-week military campaign launched by the Israeli authorities on a people that are suffering the worst humanitarian situation in the world. Nor do I think that I need to repeat what the Council has been hearing frequently over many months about the serious consequences of the Israeli blockade and siege imposed on Gaza Strip and the grave humanitarian situation resulting therefrom.

While the worst forms of aggression have stopped, the aggression is still continuing today. Indeed, it has been going on for years, for the siege, the blockade, the starvation imposed on the people of Gaza are a form of aggression. Consequently, the cessation of hostilities in itself is not enough. It is necessary now to lift the siege on Gaza, to open the crossings and to ensure the freedom of movement of persons, goods, materials and of the equipment necessary for reconstruction. In general, we must put an end to this policy of collective punishment and ensure the protection of Palestinian people.

The end of military aggression does not necessarily mean that we forget about the terrible atrocities that have been committed by the Israeli war machine against the unarmed civilians in the stricken Palestinian territory. The Israeli aggression on Gaza has been marked by many war crimes and crimes against humanity. Worse yet, the entire war constituted a war crime, because it included violations of international law, international treaties, relevant international humanitarian law and even the norms of warfare. The military operation was not balanced, but rather a unilateral massacre, as described by Dr. Kevin Cahill, Chief Adviser for Humanitarian Affairs of the President of the General Assembly. Therefore, we must investigate those violations and bring their perpetrators to justice in order to do justice for the victims and prevent such criminal acts from ever being committed again.

Many serious human rights violations were clearly evident, including the use of prohibited chemical weapons such as white phosphorous and the targeting of densely populated buildings and even houses of worship, hospitals and schools. The human conscience demands that we uncover the facts concerning all the human rights violations committed during that armed aggression and that we deny impunity to the perpetrators of those crimes.

Targeting a school with an artillery shell is a heinous crime. Nothing could be worse than the targeting of a school used as a shelter for defenceless civilians fleeing the shelling of their homes. What makes it even more heinous is the fact that the targeted building was clearly marked as a United Nations facility. Worst of all, the attacks were repeated. The repetition of those war crimes underscores the fact that they were premeditated and coordinated acts.

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Abdullah Al-Misnad, Consort of His Highness the Emir of Qatar and UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, promptly condemned the destruction of educational institutions in the Gaza Strip, calling on the Security Council to develop without delay a plan to identify those schools and educational institutions and to mark them in a conspicuous manner so that they might serve as safe havens for students and their parents. She also stressed the importance of allowing humanitarian aid and basic materials to enter those schools and institutions and of allowing the sick and injured to be transported out of them. Prior to that, Her Highness addressed a letter (S/2009/12) to the Security Council calling on it to shoulder its responsibilities and investigate the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation forces against Palestinian civilians, including women and children.

We are now hearing calls from several quarters urging that the perpetrators of war crimes and other violations that occurred in Gaza be brought to justice. Mr. Richard Falk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, recently reported that there was sufficient reason to conclude that the Israeli military operations in Gaza constitute crimes against humanity. The same conclusion has been reached by a number of non-governmental organizations active in the human rights field, including Amnesty International, which indicates that the devastation caused by the recent Israeli invasion of Gaza constitutes a war crime.

Likewise, the organization Physicians for Human Rights believes that the Israeli army violated the rules of ethics and international law by targeting paramedics and by preventing injured people from receiving treatment. Well-known persons such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Ms. Mary Robinson have called for the establishment of a board of inquiry to shed light on the war in Gaza, to conduct an accurate, comprehensive and fair investigation into all accusations related to the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict and to make recommendations regarding appropriate measures to ensure the prosecution of the perpetrators of those violations.

In particular, there is a need to investigate the Israeli army's direct attacks on schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Gaza in order to determine who was responsible for those crimes and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Given the seriousness of targeting United Nations facilities and staff and the need to ensure their safety, we welcome the Secretary-General's establishment of a Board of Inquiry and look forward to its findings.

The dire humanitarian situation facing the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory requires that international donors meet Palestinians' basic needs and finance the reconstruction of what was destroyed by the Israeli war machine. The State of Qatar played a leading role in the international efforts that brought about an end to the Israeli aggression against Gaza — efforts culminating in the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) on 8 January 2009. Similarly, the State of Qatar has been among the leading supporters of the Palestinian people, both bilaterally and through the decisions of the Council of the League of Arab States. His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of Qatar, took the initiative of convening an emergency Arab summit in Doha to support the Palestinian people, at which he announced the establishment of a fund for Gaza's reconstruction, to which he donated $250 million. In addition, the State of Qatar has sent in-kind assistance to the Palestinians by sea and air and has provided support through the United Nations, the Emir having contributed $40 million to United Nations humanitarian agencies and programmes providing emergency assistance to civilians in Gaza. In addition, long before that, the leadership of the State of Qatar launched the Fakhurah campaign, named for the school shelled by the Israeli army, which raised $110 million through a telethon.

The situation prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territories highlights once again the importance of achieving peace in the Middle East through the peace process, which requires the utmost efforts of the international community. The Security Council must put an end to the double standards and reluctance with which it has addressed an issue that not only poses a direct, serious and clear threat to international peace and security, but also constitutes a grave humanitarian situation. We therefore demand that the Council fully shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations.

If the peace process is to succeed, all segments of the Palestinian population must be involved. It is unacceptable that some are attempting to divide the Palestinian people into Hamas and Fatah factions, as the occupation does not distinguish between the parties, but affects everyone. No national differences should serve as a pretext for Israel to continue its occupation and aggression against unarmed civilians or to divide the Palestinian people or the Palestinian territory. Nor should the Palestinian people be punished for exercising their right to vote in accordance with the principles of democracy that we all advocate.

We call on the Palestinians to achieve unity and reconciliation. In addition, we call on all friendly nations to show their solidarity with the Palestinian people in their plight and to support them in their just struggle to enjoy their legitimate and inalienable rights, in particular the right to independence and self-determination and the right to establish their own State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Bangladesh.

Ms. Jahan (Bangladesh): Thank you, Mr. President, for holding this open debate on a subject that has long been on the Council's agenda — regrettably, however, without any tangible progress. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East this morning. Against the backdrop of the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the Gaza Strip, my delegation considers this session to be most timely and attaches great importance to it.

The Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In addition, we would like to highlight the following points.

At the outset, let me reaffirm Bangladesh's deep commitment to the cause of Palestine. I also take this opportunity to pledge our continued solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and statehood. Bangladesh reiterates its long-standing position that the continued occupation of Palestine is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. The people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental right to self-determination and the right to live freely in their own land. We believe that the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the only sustainable solution to this long-lasting conflict.

Bangladesh strongly condemns the attacks in Gaza that took a bitter turn in the last week of December 2008, killing and maiming innocent Palestinians, including women and children, and resulting in devastating humanitarian and economic crises. It is alarming to note that not even the humanitarian workers were spared from the atrocities and that the universal symbol of unity and peace — the United Nations compound — is no longer a safe place. We strongly condemn these heinous actions, which are blatant violations of international law. Bangladesh condemns Israel's ongoing illegal settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, which further undermines the Palestinian territory's unity and contiguity. We express our grave concern at Israel's plan to build a museum on the site of an ancient and historic Islamic cemetery and urge its immediate reversal.

Bangladesh stresses the need to conduct a thorough investigation of the heinous crimes and violations committed in the Gaza Strip and hopes that follow-up action will take place immediately thereafter so that the perpetrators of the crime can be brought to justice. We appreciate the Secretary-General's dispatch of a Board of Inquiry to conduct necessary investigation in the Gaza Strip and expect that the Board's findings will be followed up without delay. We also expect that the fact-finding mission called for by the Human Rights Council will be sent immediately.

All concerned must comply with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The United Nations, in particular the Security Council, must undertake necessary measures to ensure the full and effective implementation of that resolution. Border crossings should be opened forthwith and humanitarian workers must be guaranteed full and secure access to Gaza.

It is our belief that, under the continuous defiance and blatant disregard demonstrated by the occupying Power of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, all concerned, including the Security Council and the international community at large must make every effort to oblige Israel to comply with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map.

While we are outraged by the brutal suppression of the Palestinian people by the Israeli forces, we are also frustrated at the factional divisions among the Palestinian people. Such a lack of unity gives the wrong impression and adds fuel to the fire, thus making peace ever more elusive. We believe that unity among the Palestinians is essential in their pursuit of their just cause.

Bangladesh firmly believes that a comprehensive and just resolution of the Palestinian problem is the key to peace in the entire Middle East. The relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East Road Map remain the guiding principles in this regard. Bangladesh hopes that the international community, particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, will no longer shy away from mustering the necessary political will to achieve the much-aspired-to peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Mr. Paul Badji, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (*spoke in French*): At the outset, Sir, allow me to congratulate Libya, a brotherly country to Senegal, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. You have our every wish for success. I also wish to express appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Yukio Takasu, Permanent Representative of Japan, on the exemplary manner in which he steered the work of the Council in February.

While the massive Israeli assault and the shelling of the Gaza Strip came to an end some two months ago, the Palestinian people still cannot resume their normal lives. We know that more than 1,400 Palestinians, many of them innocent civilians, were killed. We also know that the destruction of homes, farms and infrastructure has been so immense that basic reconstruction will take years and billions of dollars.

What is most shocking is not only the brutality with which the Israeli army undertook its operations in Gaza, but also its soldiers' gross disregard for human life. Indeed, recent accounts by Israeli soldiers now make it clear that there was, in their words, "unbridled contempt for and forcefulness against the Palestinians". As was reported in *Haaretz*, an Israeli squad leader said that most of the men under his command felt that the lives of Palestinians were "far, far less important than the lives of our soldiers". Danny Zamir, head of the Yitzhak Rabin pre-military programme, was quoted by Reuters as saying that the soldiers who had participated in the Gaza operation had also "talked about unwarranted fire on Palestinian civilians".

Israel's decision to conduct an investigation into the soldiers' accounts is welcome but, sadly, will do little to relieve the horrendous suffering endured by the Gazans and will not bring the many innocent civilian victims back to life. Our Committee supports the investigative missions established by the Secretary-General, the Human Rights Council and the League of Arab States, and welcomes similar efforts by a number of international, Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations. We intend to devote one of the international meetings planned for this year to the issue of upholding international humanitarian law and, in that regard, will pay close attention to the results of the ongoing investigations.

Our Committee highly appreciates the international efforts to assist the Palestinian people in the economic and humanitarian areas. The international donor community demonstrated its readiness and generosity at the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held at Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March, by pledging some $4.5 billion to jump-start the immense and urgent task of rebuilding the Gaza Strip. The Committee urges the early fulfilment of these pledges in order to come to the assistance of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

The Committee also commends the outstanding work of United Nations personnel on the ground, first and foremost the staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza, but also their colleagues from other specialized agencies striving to restore the fabric of life of the thousands of Palestinians affected by the war.

For its part, our Committee recently held the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in Cairo on 10 and 11 March, contributing to the wider international discourse on ways of streamlining and coordinating efforts towards recovery and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

While in Cairo, the Committee delegation paid a visit to the Palestine hospital to bear witness to the human toll of the Gaza assault, in a number of highly emotional and heartbreaking encounters with wounded Gazans — mostly children and young people — we were horrified by the severity of their injuries and shocked by the accounts, both from the patients themselves and from the medical personnel, that a number of these cases, for unknown reasons, did not respond to the customary treatment protocols. This, in our view, is something that the international community and the Security Council should very seriously look into. This morning's account by my colleague the representative of Palestine was very much to the point as we stress the responsibility of the international community regarding this issue, which we view as extremely serious.

Our Committee is deeply grateful to the Government of Egypt for its determined support it provides to the Palestinian people by promoting international relief and reconstruction efforts for Gaza, facilitating the much-needed ceasefire and prisoner exchange and sponsoring talks on Palestinian national reconciliation.

Our outrage about the assault on Gaza will not overshadow the Committee's serious concern about the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel's ongoing and planned expansion of settlements, demolitions of Palestinian houses, land confiscations, construction of the wall on Palestinian land and arbitrary closures continue. We call on Israel, the occupying Power, to halt all illegal policies and practices throughout the Palestinian territory. It should immediately lift the siege on the Gaza Strip and allow uninterrupted humanitarian assistance to enter. We call

on both sides to urgently cease all acts of violence, exercise the utmost restraint and agree on a sustainable ceasefire.

The Committee stresses the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law. We urge the parties to resume negotiations on permanent status, leading to the establishment of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and living side by side with Israel in peace and security. The relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative remain the legitimate foundation for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): I wish to begin, Mr. President, by extending the appreciation of our delegation to you for convening this pertinent and timely meeting on such an important subject. I wish also to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his important briefing.

My delegation would like to offer due recognition to the recent International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March 2009, at which some $4.5 billion was pledged by members of the international community. Indonesia is encouraged by the determined commitment of the members of the international community to make a significant contribution to the cause of reconstruction and rehabilitation in the Gaza Strip. The scale of the devastation in the Gaza Strip and the urgency of the needs of the Palestinian people and Palestinian institutions simply cannot wait.

We welcome the 12 February decision of the Secretary-General to set up a Board of Inquiry charged with investigating specific incidents concerning United Nations premises or United Nations operations during the Israeli military attack on the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 19 January 2009. My delegation looks forward to the wide distribution of the report of the Board, once it has been completed.

Indonesia is of the view that, in addition to the Board of Inquiry, which has an understandably limited mandate, an independent commission should be established with the mandate to look into possible crimes against humanity committed during the Israeli military assault and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

While we await that investigation, it is important to draw fresh attention to the horrendous humanitarian challenge existing in Gaza, which cries out for our emphatic response. Regrettably, the level of assistance being allowed into the Strip by Israel falls far short of expectations, given the needs of the people. This situation is being complicated by the lengthy clearance procedures for aid workers, as well as by a variety of items having been banned by Israel. We call on Israel to grant unrestricted humanitarian assistance to all Palestinians who need it. The blockade should be lifted immediately and unconditionally, to permit the movement of people and goods.

Let me also take this opportunity to reiterate once again our outrage at the continuation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. With the construction of settlements in the West Bank having nearly doubled since 2007, and the Israeli-authority-backed initiative of carrying out new construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the prospects for the two-State solution are steadily declining.

As the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories continues and as Israeli settlers keep encroaching further into the territories, Palestinians will watch their land claims disintegrate before their eyes, making a viable Palestinian State very difficult to achieve.

Israel's settlement policies and practices, which are aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are nothing but a blatant violation of international law. The transfer of civilians to occupied areas, whether or not in settlements that are under military control, is contrary to the sixth paragraph of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which clearly states that "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." Furthermore, settlement activities are also in contradiction with the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, in accordance with the United Nations Charter. As such, they contravene the commitment of Israel to be

faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

If Israel has a genuine commitment to peace, it must stop all settlement construction, expansion and planning in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and dismantle the settlements built therein, in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In 1980, through its resolution 465 (1980), the Council called on Israel to "dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem" (*resolution 465 (1980), para. 6*). We believe that the Council could take a similar step by pronouncing itself collectively, and with a single voice, to once again urgently demand that Israel dismantle the existing settlements and cease the construction and planning of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

We would also like to underline the importance of inter-Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation. In that regard, we commend Egypt for hosting the inter-Palestinian dialogue. Indonesia wishes to encourage the Palestinian parties to ensure that their national reconciliation talks become an unqualified success. As we have stated in the past, Palestinians have much to gain by coming together. A unified platform will grant them the opportunity to negotiate the future from a position of strength and to meet their objectives. We encourage them to seize that historic opportunity.

Our commitment to an independent, viable and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with its neighbours, is absolute. A just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the relevant resolutions of the Council, must prevail. For its part, the Security Council, in shouldering its Charter-mandated responsibilities, must, and indeed can, exert a positive influence on the Middle East peace process.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Espinosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my country wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate on a topic that concerns all States Members of the Organization. My country would also like to align itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Without prejudice to that, in its national capacity, my delegation wishes to reiterate its great concern at the serious humanitarian and security situation to which the Palestinian civilian population finds itself subjected as a direct result of the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel, the blockade on the provision of humanitarian assistance, food, medicine, fuel and construction materials, the widespread destruction of public and private infrastructure in Palestine and the ongoing military aggression that continues to raise the toll of thousands of dead and wounded Palestinian civilians, including innocent women and children.

In that regard, on behalf of the President of the Republic, Rafael Correa, I wish to reiterate the solidarity of the Government and people of Ecuador with all innocent victims of the ongoing Israeli aggression. At the same time, I would like to make an urgent appeal for an immediate end to the hostilities, a solution to the humanitarian crisis, resolute international economic support to improve the grave living conditions of the affected population and, in particular, a resumed search for a definitive solution and lasting peace in the region, in accordance with all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

As a founding Member of the United Nations, Ecuador is an advocate for the peaceful settlement of international disputes and conflicts and emphatically rejects the threat or the use of force as a means to resolve them. Ecuador therefore believes that any comprehensive solution that makes it possible to achieve and preserve lasting peace in the Middle East must be a political rather than a military one. It must also include the strictest respect for international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Above all, it must include an enduring commitment to non-aggression and recognition that includes the withdrawal of Israel from the territories occupied since 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

To achieve that, my country believes that — without prejudice to the responsibilities of the Security Council established in the United Nations Charter —

there are a number of legal alternatives in other bodies of the international system that could enable the international community as a whole to ensure that justice is done, thereby effectively responding to the urgent appeal of the Palestinian people and, at the same time, paving the way for the restoration of lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

Clearly, that effort must complement other processes that are under way. In particular, we would like to refer to the one recently established by the Human Rights Council to investigate human rights violations perpetrated during the latest attacks on the Gaza Strip at the start of this year. We look forward with great interest and anticipation to the steps to be taken and the handling of that matter by the Human Rights Council, including the special mission that it has requested.

In all those efforts, my country is ready to extend its support and cooperation in developing any initiative aimed at consolidating a lasting peace that would benefit not only the peoples of Palestine and Israel but those of the whole region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Zainuddin (Malaysia): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf on the Non-Aligned Movement.

We had hoped that this meeting could have been held much earlier, closer to when the guns fell silent over Gaza. With our eyes wide open and fresh memories of the devastation wrought in the wake of the Israeli Operation Cast Lead, our proceedings would have more vividly captured the vast sense of outrage and disappointment that many around the world had expressed for our collective inability to stop the unnecessary killings, injuries and destruction. More so, the prospect for peace in the Middle East was slipping away very fast.

Nonetheless, the convening of this meeting is still timely, albeit two months after the tragedy. It would seem that the world has moved on; or has it? Maybe the world has, but definitely not the Palestinian question. International efforts are afoot to try to rebuild Gaza. Earlier this month, $4.5 billion was pledged at a conference in Sharm el-Sheikh to reconstruct Gaza. That is an effort, among few others, that we commend and applaud, as that contribution will help the survivors to pick up the pieces of their lives shattered by that war.

It seems strange, however, from the perspective of a layman, for someone else to be footing the bill, so to speak, when it is clear who the perpetrator was that caused all that damage and destruction and got off scot-free. Definitely, questions are being raised as to who caused the killing, destruction and maiming of the families who lived in their homes. Where are the perpetrators of those crimes? Why are they not being brought to justice? Is there no recourse to take action against those perpetrators, including prosecuting them for war crimes and crimes against humanity? Is there not enough evidence to bring them to justice? My delegation believes that there is.

Recent action by the International Criminal Court shows us that there is recourse in that direction. Evidence, including testimonies and accounts by Israeli soldiers that war crimes were indeed committed, is beginning to surface.

We await the findings of the Board of Inquiry set up by the Secretary-General to look into incidents involving attacks by Israel on United Nations premises and staff, and we are quite confident about what the outcome will be. Indeed, we welcome the setting up of the Board of Inquiry, but we would have expected it to expand its mandate to include more than just United Nations premises and staff. There should be no distinction between attacks on United Nations premises and staff and attacks on Palestinian civilians and their homes, as they are both clear violations of international law. The Council should consider all the evidence, including the Board of Inquiry's report, with due seriousness and articulate its position on this issue.

We urge the Council not to remain silent on these violations but to act appropriately. We are fearful that inaction on the part of the Council on this matter would signal that it condones these actions and, worse still, justify criminality. Malaysia has called for the establishment of a war crimes tribunal to investigate and prosecute those who committed war crimes during the Gaza war. There have been increasing calls towards this end, including by civil society.

By not taking steps to investigate and prosecute war criminals, we have failed to set the record straight

on the events that transpired during Operation Cast Lead. It is our moral obligation to the survivors to give them at least a sense of closure and succour for their plight. If we do not do that, we risk seeing another generation of Palestinians who have witnessed at close quarters the death of their loved ones become even more radicalized.

We should recall that, notwithstanding the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), the ceasefire which hangs over Gaza was taken unilaterally. There is no guarantee that Israel will not launch another strike, as it has done time and time again, such as in Lebanon in 2006. The establishment of a war crimes tribunal, inter alia, represents a clear preventive measure against the recurrence of such wanton acts.

Some have argued that the violence on Gaza was self-inflicted. They argued that Israel's attack was justified as it was a response to the rockets fired into towns in southern Israel. My delegation could agree that the war brought on Gaza was not an isolated event but in fact was part of the siege that at that time had lasted 18 months — a siege that has choked Gaza, an open prison to begin with, and cut it off from the outside world. Under this siege, the people in Gaza are forced to cope with the challenges of a humanitarian crisis. For any people, indeed, living under such circumstances would necessarily breed a sense of desperation and despondency for the future. The siege is still in place today and is curtailing the flow of humanitarian aid that is even more necessary now to rebuild Gaza.

In no way does my delegation condone violence, but if some, even among Council members, can find it in themselves to justify the right of Israel to defend itself, can the Palestinians not also invoke this same right, since it is they who have borne the brunt of more than 40 years of the Occupation?

We should continue to focus on the question of the occupation and on abolishing it, by which the Council can contribute to building real security for the region. We should recall that it is the Security Council that adopted resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which lay out the framework for the realization of peace in the Middle East. Israel must cease its policy of annexation of Palestinian lands and its further appropriation of such lands. There must also be a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem.

In this regard, we should also recognize that the Arab countries, through the Arab Peace Initiative, have offered peace and normalized relations with Israel along the lines of the same terms struck in those resolutions. However, my delegation fears that this offer may not remain on the table indefinitely if there is no sincere overture from Israel to achieve peace on equal terms with its neighbours.

Indeed, the actions by the Israelis in no way suggest that they are moving towards finding a peaceful settlement. On the contrary, their actions are hurting the Middle East peace process by making it even harder to realize the vision of a two-State solution — of a viable, territorially contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The separation wall continues to snake through the West Bank. Its construction complements the intricate system of roadblocks, checkpoints and other barriers that hinder Palestinian movement and prevent Palestinians from engaging in normal economic activities. Illegal settlements continue to be built and expanded in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. To make way for these settlements, Palestinians are forced to abandon their homes by various means including so-called legal means. Palestinians are subject to heavy fines by the Israeli authorities if they fail to comply, which gives rise to reports of Palestinians being forced to tear down their own homes with their own hands.

These illegal settlements also form the base from which illegal settlers launch so much violence and aggression upon Palestinians. The construction and expansion of illegal settlements, which are in clear contravention of Security Council resolutions and, in particular, in violation of the recent understanding reached, with United States mediation, at the Annapolis Peace Conference in November 2007, are a major cause of the failure of the Middle East peace process. Israel must put a stop to these illegal settlements and return this land to its rightful Palestinian owners.

The task for the Council is nothing less than formidable. It is to rebuild the destroyed hope for peace among Palestinians, Israelis and the inhabitants of the wider Middle East, which would have reverberations for the state of international peace and security. It is a task that is even more difficult considering the present situation in Israel and

Palestine. To prod the Middle East peace process forward, the Security Council has no choice but to force Israel to comply fully with the Council's resolutions. My delegation also hopes that intra-Palestinian talks will find a successful conclusion in which we can see a common people come to unity.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this public debate. I should also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

As is evident from today's discussion, two months after Israel's savagé assault on Gaza, the situation remains troubling in the highest degree, both in the Gaza Strip and throughout the Palestinian territories. Despite the repeated appeals of the international community to lift it, the intolerable blockade of Gaza remains in place, illegal Israeli practices continue with impunity throughout the Palestinian territories, including the construction of settlement, and the peace process is deadlocked.

Algeria firmly condemns the continued Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territory in violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. It expresses its concern with regard to the negative repercussions on the future of the peace process as a result of Israel's determination to scuttle all diplomatic efforts aimed at bringing about conditions that could restart negotiations.

In order to confront the occupying Power's outlaw behaviour and its headlong rush to repeatedly evade obligations placed upon it by the international community, Algeria calls for unity in the Palestinian ranks and calls upon the international community to lend the support necessary to achieve this prime objective. Algeria supports ongoing efforts at intra-Palestinian reconciliation, with the welcome mediation of Egypt. We welcome the support and constructive role played here by States of the region, which have placed within reach the formation of a government of national unity under the Palestinian Authority for the sole benefit of the Palestinian people and their cause.

The Israeli occupier has no illusions about the importance of this strategic objective and continues to add obstacles and demands aimed at undermining these efforts, whose achievement which would mark the beginning of the reconstruction of Gaza and the moment of truth with regard to Israel's intentions regarding the peace process. In this regard, the remarkable generosity shown at the donor conference for the reconstruction of Gaza, which Algeria joined, clearly illustrates Israel's isolation on the international stage.

Algeria is determined to remind the international community, and the Security Council in particular, of their obligation to complete all investigations of war crimes, crimes against humanity and flagrant violations of international law and international humanitarian law of which Israel is guilty in Gaza, so that serious measures may be taken to bring the perpetrators to justice. An end must be put to the impunity that Israel has displayed for too long at the cost of sacrificing all efforts to achieve peace in the region.

Finally, Algeria would express its unwavering support for Syria and Lebanon in their efforts to recover their legitimate national rights and the territory of which they have been despoiled by the Israeli occupying force. We remain committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict based on international law and the principles defined by the Madrid Conference and by the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express my deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. I also take this opportunity to welcome and congratulate you on assuming your position as President of the Security Council for this month. My delegation also thanks Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his valuable briefing.

The Security Council is meeting today to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The meeting is taking place at a time when tension continues to spread throughout the area due to the disastrous effects of the destructive Israeli war machine in the Gaza Strip including immense destruction that did not spare even United Nations facilities. Our Government therefore reiterates the need for the international community, represented by the Security Council as the organ charged with maintaining international peace and security, to find a

just solution for the Palestinian people that guarantees their right to self-determination and to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, so they may live side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. My Government also emphasizes the need for the international community to work as soon as possible to compel Israel to immediately halt its ongoing illegal settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which seriously threaten the demographic composition and geographic integrity of the Holy City. The international community must also urge Israel to end the blockade of the Gaza Strip and implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 1860 (2009), which calls, inter alia, for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical treatment, to citizens throughout Gaza, for the opening of humanitarian corridors and for international efforts to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza.

Our Government also notes with satisfaction the results of the Sharm el-Sheikh donor conference and calls upon the parties to expedite the delivery of assistance to the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza, and to begin reconstruction as soon as possible. We also welcome the results of the inter-Palestinian reconciliation talks and look forward to the establishment, as soon as possible, of a national unity Government that responds to the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to emphasize that any solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be achieved without the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and without the return of all of the territories occupied in 1967 including the Syrian Golan, the Lebanese Sheba'a farms and the Lebanese part of Ghajar village. That can only happen through Israel's compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): We join others in expressing our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. We also welcome the opportunity to participate and share our views on the issue before the Security Council today. We thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing this morning. South Africa aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The current multifaceted crisis in the Middle East should be understood in the context of the ongoing Israeli military occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories, which dates back to 1967, and the associated denial of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. Indeed, Israel's long track record of disregarding international law and the failure of the Security Council to take any meaningful action in response is the key contributing factor to the lack of progress in the peace process.

It is essential to the maintenance of international peace and security that all parties fully respect and meet their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, and that the Security Council discharge its mandate under the United Nations Charter without selectivity or double standards.

A few months have passed since Israel's most deadly attack on Gaza since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. South Africa wishes to stress the importance of an independent investigation of the events in Gaza and of full accountability for any violations of international law by whomsoever they were committed. In this regard, we welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to establish and dispatch a Board of Inquiry to Gaza. We expect that the Board's report will be presented to the General Assembly and the Security Council so that the necessary follow-up actions can be taken.

While the latest military incursion has come to an end, we should not forget the consequences of the disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks on one of the most heavily populated areas in the world, where the civilian population was denied any means of escaping the onslaught by land, air or sea. It is reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that 1,455 Palestinians were killed and around 5,000 were injured and that most of the victims were innocent civilians, including women and 431 children. An entire civilian population is traumatized and impoverished. Most of the Gaza infrastructure has been destroyed, including a large number of schools, clinics and hospitals. Israel bears full responsibility for compensating the Palestinian people for its actions.

However, the international community must also take the lead in efforts to rebuild Gaza.

For its part, the South African Government has decided to contribute 1 million rand to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) emergency flash appeal fund. This contribution is designed to supplement the annual contribution to UNRWA and other ongoing South African assistance programmes to Palestine, including its contribution to the Palestinian capacity-building initiative under the aegis of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership. Also, South African civil society is actively assisting the Palestinian people through, inter alia, the provision of medical assistance.

South Africa condemns the continuing Israeli blockade of Gaza and the ongoing construction and expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The continuing construction of the separation wall and the intensified home demolition programmes that we are currently witnessing in East Jerusalem constitute serious violations of international law, as definitively clarified in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Those activities also undermine all efforts to achieve peace between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

We also call on the Palestinians to stop firing Qassam rockets into Israel. The only lesson that we have been able to learn from those retaliatory actions over the past decades is that they merely provide cover for more violence to be perpetuated against the innocent Palestinian people. We also call upon the Palestinian parties not to be diverted from their objective of forming a new unity Government. In that regard, we support Egypt in its efforts aimed at assisting the Palestinian parties to achieve national reconciliation.

South Africa calls upon the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to fully respect international law, and on the Security Council to discharge its Charter-mandated responsibilities. South Africa continues to support a negotiated and peaceful solution to the conflict on the basis of the principle of land for peace, as expressed in international resolutions and initiatives such as resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, we look forward to a day when the bloodshed ends and two States, Palestine and Israel, are able to coexist in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders. This vision of a two-State solution, as endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1397 (2002), must underpin any permanent settlement of this conflict.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing us to speak. Nine weeks ago, the fighting in Gaza came to an end, after the parties each declared unilateral ceasefires. But for the battle-scarred civilian population of Gaza, there has been little improvement. The fragile ceasefires are frequently violated by both sides, and the Israeli embargo remains largely intact. A political solution to the conflict — as opposed to military containment — seems as elusive as ever.

Israeli military operations brought massive suffering and large-scale destruction to the civilian infrastructure in Gaza. But thus far very little has been rebuilt, and the humanitarian situation remains grave. Many families are still homeless and exposed to the cold and the rain. Israel severely restricts the import of basic building materials, such as cement, wood and glass. Food, medicine and fuel are still in short supply. We are concerned that Israel's restrictions on cash transfers to Gaza will impede the essential work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), such as its school programme that feeds 200,000 children.

We recognize Israel's security concerns, but Israel must honour its obligation under international humanitarian law and open its border crossings to Gaza. We welcome the recent Israeli cabinet decision to allow all food items into Gaza, and we look forward to the full implementation of this decision.

The Sharm el-Sheikh conference brought the international community together in a show of support for the Palestinian people. Norway stands by its pledges and is contributing 760 million Norwegian kroner, which is equivalent to $120 million, towards the Palestinian people this year. Without continued budget support to the Palestinian Authority, 77,000 public servants providing basic social services will not receive their salaries. We, the international community, must set aside our differences. Financial and political support for the Palestinians must be directed through existing mechanisms and towards the Palestinian

Authority. The Security Council has given the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, which Norway chairs, a central role in alleviating the situation in Gaza. Norway will in the near future convene a meeting of the Committee, in close consultation with the parties.

The division among Palestinians is a tragedy. The civilian population of Gaza has paid a high price for this division. We support Egypt's efforts to facilitate Palestinian reconciliation and pave the way for an interim Government. The Palestinian people, both in Gaza and the West Bank, deserve a democratic and peaceful Government. At the same time, we warn against placing impossible hurdles to political progress. We must not let the perfect become the enemy of the good. Concerted efforts by the countries in the region and the international community as a whole are necessary to bring the peace process forward.

While the situation in Gaza remains grave, we must not lose sight of the situation in the rest of the Palestinian territory. In violation of the commitments it made, Israel has continued to expand settlements in the West Bank. We are equally concerned by the continued destruction of Palestinian houses and evictions of Palestinian families. Settlements have become an all-too-familiar theme in this Council, but it must be said again that Israeli settlements and closures strangle the Palestinian economy and undermine the prospects for a viable Palestinian State.

Every day that passes without improvement in the lives of the civilian population of Gaza adds to the failure of the parties and, I regret to say, to our collective failure to end the conflict and bring peace to the region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate at this crucial juncture. I also take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Ambassador, on your new assignment as the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations and to wish you every success.

As mentioned by many speakers who took the floor before me, during the period under review, as throughout the past six decades, the Israeli regime has continued its expansionist and destructive policies and practices and its illegal and colonization measures against the Palestinian people. It has also persisted in its aggressive and expansionist policies towards Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan. It continues to violate the most basic principles of international law, international humanitarian and human rights law and the United Nations Charter, and persists in its defiance of numerous resolutions of different United Nations bodies, including this Council.

Palestinian civilians continue to be under constant Israeli threat and attacks. The construction of the illegal apartheid wall is continuing unabated despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and in spite of the strong condemnation coming from the international community. Illegal settlements are expanding much faster than in the past, and Palestinian lives and livelihoods continue to be shattered. More and more Palestinian homes are demolished, including those located in refugee camps, as a result of the widest campaign in the past 40 years for the demolition by the Israeli regime of Palestinian homes in the occupied Palestinian territories. This move is undoubtedly orchestrated to illegally alter the demographic composition and character of Palestinian territories, particularly Al-Quds Al-Sharif and its surrounding areas.

The international community has not forgotten, nor will it ever forget, the Israeli atrocities in the Gaza Strip. Every day, new faces of this regime's war crimes, and of crimes against humanity perpetrated against the innocent Palestinians during its aggression against the Gaza Strip, are revealed and new revelations in this regard emerge, causing more and more outrage across the globe. The recent reports by United Nations human rights rapporteurs, including that prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, clearly indicate and illustrate some aspects of the Israeli crimes against innocent Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Those reports attest to the appalling fact that, in the Zionist regime's aggression against Gaza, civilian targets, particularly homes and their occupants, basic infrastructure, schools, medical facilities and innocent civilians, including women and children, have been callously and deliberately targeted.

There are many shocking accounts of Israeli crimes contained in those reports. For example, it is mentioned that in one case, among many other similar cases,

> "Israeli soldiers shot a father after ordering him out of his house and then opened fire into the room where the rest of the family was sheltering, wounding the mother and three brothers and killing a fourth."

Those reports cite yet another inhumane practice that is in violation of the most basic principles of international humanitarian and human rights law: Israeli soldiers used children as human shields. It is mentioned in these reports that for instance,

> "on January 15, at Tal al Hawa, south-west of Gaza City, Israeli soldiers forced an 11-year-old boy to walk in front of them for several hours as they moved through the town, even after they had been shot at".

Israeli soldiers are also confessing to the crimes they have committed against the Palestinian people during their aggression on Gaza. An Israeli commander who was present during the aggression against Gaza just recently told various international news agencies, "If you want to know whether I think that we killed innocents, the answer is unequivocally yes".

The news reports regarding the tee shirt designs made for Israeli soldiers that encouraged them to shoot children and pregnant Palestinian mothers are another indication of the criminal policies and practices of the said regime, as well as of the depths of its atrocities in its aggression against the Gaza Strip. Appalling captions, such as "1 shot, 2 kills" printed on a tee shirt depicting a pregnant Palestinian, or the shocking caption of "The smaller, the harder" on another tee shirt depicting a child, are indicative of the atrocious and criminal nature of the Israeli regime's policies and practices in its aggression against the Palestinians and other Arab peoples in the region.

There is now more than enough evidence for the international judicial mechanism to move expeditiously to bring Israeli war criminals to justice. The calls from international public opinion to not allow these crimes to go unpunished should be heard and heeded. The Security Council has an important responsibility to discharge in that regard.

We thank the Secretary-General for his efforts in establishing a Board of Inquiry and dispatching it to Gaza, as well as for his commitment to report back to the Security Council on the findings of the Board. We await that report and expect that more concerted steps will be taken by the United Nations to hold the Israeli war criminals accountable for their atrocities in Gaza. The credibility of the United Nations is at stake. International public opinion is closely watching how the Security Council, and the United Nations in general, will deal with these crimes.

As several human rights mandate-holders have underlined in their reports recently, the suffering and torment of the Palestinian people caused by the inhuman Israeli blockade should be ended immediately. The Israeli regime should be forced to end the crippling blockade on Gaza and allow immediate and unimpeded access by the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to humanitarian assistance, including food, medical supplies, fuel and construction materials. We hope that the Security Council will take meaningful steps to compel the regime to end its blockade, which has brought about an unprecedented humanitarian crisis for the innocent Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

I wish to conclude by stressing that my delegation rejects the unfounded allegations made against the Islamic Republic of Iran by the representative of the Zionist regime in today's meeting of the Council. Nothing could be more preposterous than to hear the representative of a regime that has no respect for the most basic standards of humanity and decency, with its known record of State terrorism and its possession of a nuclear arsenal, levelling baseless allegations against others.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure for me to welcome you, Mr. President, a brother representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, a country that is a friend of Nicaragua, and to see you leading this debate. Without a doubt, your experience and knowledge will contribute to the success of this debate. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for the report he gave us this morning.

As stated by Dr. Kevin Cahill, Chief Adviser for Humanitarian Affairs of the President of the General

Assembly and his special envoy on the situation in Gaza,

> "Seeing Gaza in February 2009, shortly after the Israeli invasion, reminds me of engravings of Dante's *Inferno*. The level of destruction recalled images from Dresden or Hiroshima at the end of the Second World War. There were areas in the northern Gaza Strip in which not a single structure was left standing."

The primary responsibility for resolving the Palestinian problem lies with the United Nations, and specifically with the Security Council, which has simply not acted in conformity with its mandate under the Charter of the United Nations. Why was the Security Council unable to act and call for a ceasefire in the course of 22 days of aggression, knowing that this was not a mere skirmish but rather a total massacre against the Palestinian people? Is there any other example in today's world of an invading occupying country being able to settle more than half a million colonists on the territory of the occupied country without being sanctioned even once by society, as represented in the United Nations? We want to condemn and to emphasize the illegality of these actions, which are tantamount to a de facto annexation that undermines the integrity, contiguity, viability and unity of the Palestinian territory, thereby jeopardizing the very establishment of a State.

What is worse, however, is that the situation continues to be the same as when Dr. Cahill witnessed it. Rebuilding has not yet begun, because Israel will not allow the import of steel, cement or glass, among other building materials. The people of Gaza have lived under hostile occupation for more than four decades. In recent years, there has been a continuous reduction in all imports and exports, which has served to slowly strangle the economy. That has led to one of the highest rates of unemployment and among the lowest levels of nutrition in the developing world. Even the import of lentils, pasta and tomato juice has been restricted, based on the incomprehensible logic that such items could pose a threat to the security of Israel.

Military controls have been imposed through grinding force and a level of disregard that clearly illustrates the intention to crush the human dignity of the proud and heroic Palestinian people. The daily humiliation at border crossings and in the course of constant incursions by Israeli soldiers, as well as the herding together of people, reveal a consistent and generalized pattern on the part of the occupation. The Council must demand that all crossing points be opened and that people and goods be allowed free access. In particular, the Council must demand humanitarian access to the Palestinian population, which has yet to recover at all from the latest aggression.

In his report to the Human Rights Council, Mr. Richard Falk, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, indicated that the number of dead Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip was six times as high as the number of heroic combatants killed. That illustrates that no distinction was made between civilian and military targets. He also underscored the fact that Israel also used all sorts of weapons against densely populated areas, including aeroplanes, heavy weaponry and even prohibited weapons. The forced confinement of Gaza's civilian population to the zone of conflict during the operation denied them the option of finding sanctuary. Such a policy must be viewed as a new type of crime against humanity. The Rapporteur also stated that people in Gaza holding foreign passports were allowed to leave the territory, while Palestinians — including the sick, disabled, orphaned, elderly and injured — were denied that option. The Special Rapporteur requested an in-depth investigation into the abuses committed, emphasizing the need to draw on the relevant experiences and rulings of the principal international courts.

We wish to take this opportunity to request that the Secretary-General distribute the report containing the conclusions and recommendations of the Board of Inquiry be dispatched to Gaza. We have no doubt that that new report will further inform the international community about the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and that its recommendations will be of great importance for future action by the Security Council and the General Assembly. We also wish to emphasize the importance of the immediate dispatch of the Human Rights Council fact-finding mission.

My Government supports the adoption of the measures necessary to ensure that Israel withdraws totally and unconditionally from the occupied territories, that those responsible for Israel's war crimes and crimes against humanity against the

Palestinian people — including genocide and ethnic cleansing — are prosecuted, that the peace process is intensified and that the Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable right to self-determination on the basis of the borders prior to 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as their capital.

My Government supports negotiations to achieve reconciliation among all Palestinian forces and to form a government of unity and reconciliation whose representatives can sit down, united and strong, at the negotiating table with the occupying Power and its allies. The entire Non-Aligned Movement will stand with them.

Nicaragua expresses its solidarity with the Government and the people of Lebanon and calls on Israel to end the occupation of northern Ghajar and the adjacent area north of the Blue Line and to avoid any violation of the sovereignty and independence of Lebanese territory. We also demand a swift resolution of the issue of the Shaba'a farms with full respect for the territorial integrity of Lebanon, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006). In addition, we join with others in demanding, as a matter of humanitarian concern, that Israel provide maps of the mines that it planted during its attacks on Lebanon. Thus, we could prevent many deaths.

My Government also expresses its solidarity with the people and the Government of Syria and condemns Israel's illegal occupation of the Golan Heights. It should be recalled that any change intended to alter the physical, legal, demographic or institutional character of the Golan Heights or any measure to impose Israeli jurisdiction and administration there is contrary to international law and null and void.

Accordingly, Nicaragua will continue to support all measures, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, that will help us to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and, in particular, to ultimately establish a free, sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Zoubi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, and the sisterly Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the current month and to congratulate your predecessor, who skilfully conducted the work of the Council last month.

My delegation wishes to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Palestinian question continues to be at the core of the conflict in the Middle East, and there continues to be an urgent need to find a peaceful solution that will lead to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace accepted by all parties. There is no alternative to the two-State solution. All parties must seriously engage in negotiations targeted at achieving the only possible solution: an independent Palestinian State. Peace and stability in the region and for its peoples can be achieved only through a peaceful solution based on the two-State vision.

The peace to which Arabs aspire is one based on the restoration of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, including their right to establish an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, which is a basic attempt to address all aspects of the Israeli-Arab conflict. In that regard, Jordan welcomes the efforts of the Quartet. We commend the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations, including the Security Council, and approve of the positive moves by the United States Administration in embarking directly on peace efforts. We also commend and appreciate the international support for efforts to find a solution to the problems in the Middle East, and we hope that it will be reciprocated by all parties concerned.

Jordan condemns all unilateral measures and practices that obstruct the peace process, in particular the settlement activities being carried out in East Jerusalem. Moreover, the natural growth in the existing settlements in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, threatens the negotiations on final status and runs counter to Israel's obligations. Such activities remain an obstacle to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State.

Israel, the occupying Power, must refrain from any attempts to change the character of East Jerusalem, including excavations near the Al-Aqsa mosque, and

put an end to its aggressions against Islamic sites, notably the historic Ma'man Allah cemetery, which contains the tombs of prominent Arab and Muslim personages, and to its attempts to deface or eliminate its Islamic and Arab features and to build a museum over it. Israel must halt those illegal and sacrilegious activities and respect Jordan's special and historical role in preserving those Muslim holy sites, in accordance with the provisions of the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty.

The Security Council should exert pressure on Israel to put an immediate end to its aggressions, which can only increase tension in the region. Israel's unilateral and illegal measures, which seek to create new facts on the ground, to eliminate Jerusalem's Arab and Islamic character and alter its legal status, constitute aggressions against the rights of the Palestinian people, sacred Muslim shrines and the Islamic heritage, whose preservation has been called for by UNESCO. Those measures run counter to all international norms and resolutions calling on Israel to maintain the historic sites and religious shrines in Jerusalem.

Israel must fully lift its blockade on Gaza, open all crossing points and refrain from obstructing the efforts of humanitarian relief agencies to meet humanitarian needs and provide medical treatment. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains desperate. Gaza must be rebuilt, and the devastating effects of the Israel invasion must be addressed.

My delegation hopes that the Security Council will seriously and expeditiously consider the report of the Board of Inquiry established to investigate Israeli against United Nations facilities in Gaza. Jordan is fully committed to supporting its Palestinian brothers and sisters, alleviating their suffering and providing them with humanitarian assistance through Hashemite philanthropic agencies. We also stand ready to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance provided by other States and entities. Typically, between 18 and 24 trucks leave Jordan daily. As of 18 March, a total of 47 convoys, comprising 804 trucks, have left Jordan since the aggression against Gaza.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on the representative of Australia.

Mr. Hill (Australia): The Australian Government remains committed to the Middle East peace process and to the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The tragic events of December and January have underlined yet again the vital importance of efforts towards Middle East peace. Australia was deeply saddened by the recent conflict in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel and its humanitarian cost. Australia condemns any ongoing rocket and mortar fire perpetrated by Hamas as a threat to peace in the region.

We recognize the importance of the Gazan people's having access to humanitarian and other assistance so that rebuilding and reconstruction can take place, and call on Israel to do all it can to help increase the flow of humanitarian goods and other necessary supplies into the Gaza Strip.

Australia believes that the priority for both sides remains just as much as ever the pursuit of a two-State solution to the conflict based on the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to a viable State of their own and Israel's right to live in peace within secure borders. It is also essential that members of the international community lend their support. In this regard, we recognize and commend efforts, such as the Arab Peace Initiative, towards a broader Middle East peace. We also commend the role Egypt has played and strongly support a durable and fully respected ceasefire, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009). We welcome Palestinian reconciliation, which should be consistent with Quartet principles.

Australia recognizes the vital importance of recovery and reconstruction efforts and the central role of the Palestinian Authority in this regard. That is why Australia was pleased to announce at Sharm el-Sheikh a contribution of $20 million to assist the efforts of the Palestinian Authority, with United Nations agencies and other donors, to meet the recovery and reconstruction needs of the Palestinian people. This assistance builds on the $10 million which Australia had already committed in January for emergency and humanitarian relief through United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and the $45 million provided in 2008. Australia stands ready to provide whatever further practical assistance we can.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Park In-kook (Republic of Korea): It is very unfortunate and deplorable that, two months after the declaration of unilateral ceasefires, the situation in the

Gaza Strip is still fragile and a proper ceasefire regime is yet to be established. Moreover, as we have heard today, all too many Gazans, most of whom have nothing to do with the cause of the conflict, are still suffering from the lack of basic goods and supplies such as food, nutrition, shelter and proper medical supplies due to the aftermath of the January conflict. This unjustifiable misery and the humanitarian suffering of the population of Gaza must be stopped immediately.

In this vein, my delegation joins many others that have spoken before us in urging all parties directly concerned to work to establish a durable and fully respected ceasefire agreement at the earliest juncture, secure unimpeded passage for humanitarian aid to the suffering people in Gaza, and take all necessary measures to fully implement resolution 1860 (2009). The effective provision of international aid and the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip depend on the creation of a stable environment. In order to enable long-term development and help people to engage in their everyday lives, Israel and Palestine must work diligently for an enduring peace settlement.

Three weeks ago, representatives of 72 countries and 12 international organizations gathered together at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to discuss ways to assist in the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip following its destruction during the January military conflict. At the meeting, nearly $5 billion were pledged to aid the early recovery and reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. The fact that so many countries congregated and offered to mobilize so much capital in such a short time clearly represents our shared desire and hope for enduring peace and security in the Gaza Strip and the Middle East.

However, it should be remembered that, regardless of how many resources are mobilized or donors committed to pledged contributions, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and, more broadly, long-term economic development in the area cannot be pursued unless all parties directly concerned demonstrate strong political will for peace and exercise restraint. All the assistance of the international community will be in vain unless substantial progress is made in the peace process. Those directly concerned should shoulder the primary responsibility for peace and reconstruction in the Middle East. With the United Nations and the international community, Korea stands ready to provide our support to the peace process between Israel and Palestine and to the reconstruction and long-term development of the Palestinian territories.

Since we have a vivid memory of the misery of war ourselves, Korea promptly provided relief aid to the Palestine refugees in Gaza through the International Committee of the Red Cross shortly after the conflict arose in the Gaza Strip last January. Korea also has the experience of a nation and community rebuilding from the destruction of war. We are ready to share this experience to assist in reconstructing the Gaza Strip and pursue longer-term economic development in the Palestinian territories. The Korean Government has already pledged $15 million in assistance to the Palestinians in 2009 and 2010, including an additional $2 million-worth of assistance.

My delegation assures you, Sir, and the Security Council that Korea will continue to contribute to the reconstruction and humanitarian relief efforts for the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian territories.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Daou (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, and your country, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for your initiative to convene this open debate on the very important issue of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Indeed, the Middle East, as the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, might have served as a true bridge between the peoples of the world. Regrettably, however, for several decades it has remained a zone of tension. Instability in that part of the world naturally affects all other regions of the planet. Need I recall that no issue more fully encapsulates all the resentments prevalent in the region than the Palestinian question?

We believe that the settlement of the problem can no longer be postponed. The outlines of a peaceful settlement to the conflict, involving the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State living in peace and security within secure and recognized borders alongside the State of Israel, have long been well defined. It is therefore high time to work to achieve that noble objective.

In that regard, it is important to ensure the effective implementation of the relevant resolutions of

our Organization, especially those of the Security Council, including resolution 1860 (2009) of 8 January, which calls for a ceasefire, the lifting of the blockade against Gaza and the resumption of negotiations with a view to reaching a comprehensive peace. We call for the timely resumption of the peace process and encourage Egypt's efforts to achieve reconciliation among the Palestinians.

The situation has become all the more critical as a result of Israel's recent aggression against the Gaza Strip, which not only exacerbated the rift between the Israeli and Palestinian communities, but also and above all unleashed a humanitarian disaster in Gaza. We commend the Secretary-General's initiative to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Gaza in order to investigate war crimes committed by the Israeli army. We also applaud the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other humanitarian organizations, who are doing outstanding work in the field.

Allow me to reiterate the constant and tireless support of the people and Government of Mali for the just and noble cause of the Palestinian people on the path to comprehensive peace, which we all fervently desire. Mali remains firmly convinced that, with the support of the international community and the solidarity of all peace- and justice-loving peoples, the valiant people of Palestine will regain their national rights, especially their right to a sovereign and independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): I, too, would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing this morning. It is also a pleasure to see you, Mr. President, presiding over this meeting.

A lot has been said here today. A lot has been expressed in terms of a lot of hope and in terms of what the future holds. I believe that peace is slowly becoming a word in the world lexicon of diplomacy that actually means "do nothing", and that is a very sad comment on where mankind is headed.

I know for a fact that the Jewish community faced a horrible diaspora. I read about it in history. As a historian, the way they were dispersed was abhorrent to me. As a person who read about the Warsaw ghettos, who read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and who enjoyed the great music that they created internationally and the very strong traditions of culture that they brought to the Abrahamic religions and communities as their forerunners, I know that they were in many ways a model of fortitude. Those who had faced an Armageddon surely would know better than to create one.

I read in the press recently the statements of young, idealistic soldiers of the Israeli army and saw how they spoke about how a fervour of religious war was encouraged in them to make them go out and face the Gaza Strip and what was happening there. It is a sad day when we play these games that create divisions in the world.

I know for a fact that Muslims have a long and old tradition. At one stage, after the very horrible persecution of the community, when registers were drawn up in Spain, the Muslim caliphs who at that time ruled Jerusalem invited the first return of the diaspora back to Jerusalem. It was the Ottoman caliphs who reinducted, at a later stage, a member of the community into the Jerusalem council. This is history. I believe that to give this a tinge of a holy war, as I read in the papers today, is a sad, sad statement.

It is an even sadder statement because, in many ways, as I have said earlier, some of the very strong leads for civilization come from the Jewish community. Its travails are a part of history. Who has not read Leon Uris? Have we not all sympathized with what happened? Then, if you have faced all this, how can you inflict such things on others? The one thing that the various books and various prophecies have revealed is the enormous fortitude, enormous patience and enormous caring for the people of God. Are we all not the children of God? We are.

Therefore, I feel that this is the time to make the statement that one would expect better. The world looks upon Israel as a role model in the West. How many children do we know in homes across America and Europe who play with little toys that can sometimes cause immense damage? How many do we know about who have actually, through an incendiary device, accidentally killed thousands of people, even in the city of New York? Yesterday they had a day of remembrance for many people who died due to a fire. To retaliate, then, with the might of an empire, with thousands killed in a reprisal, this is regrettable.

It is more regrettable because it comes from a people who should be known in history for their resilience, their fortitude and their courage. Those beliefs do not make you weak, they make you strong. But strength does not come through dominating others. That is why a little, defiant David shot the sling that killed Goliath. The issue was, however, that he remained a personable person and remembered that his strength was not to be used to inflict harm on the innocent. That is a lesson we should take from history.

The unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict remains a severe thorn in the side of the United Nations and the world community. There is a lack of any tangible process. We hear of the peace process, we hear of road maps. It is amazing. I never fully understood the words "one step forward and two steps back" until this particular part of the world proved to me that this is something to be believed. We have seen hopes repeatedly dashed and international incidents created out of relatively small events. We have seen the stark violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. We have seen draconian policies and practices. We have seen the fragmentation and the absolute fracture of Palestinian society. We have seen walls built.

Amazingly, the greatest wall in the world, the Great Wall of China, could not keep the marauders out for too long, but certainly kept a lot of people in who could not escape the vicious practices of many empires. Does this create hope? Does this create a better system? Does this create something that the world can be proud of? I think the right to personal movement and unabated settlement activity are creating new aspects on the ground. The continuing inhumane and unlawful siege of the Gaza Strip has transformed it virtually into an open prison, where hundreds of thousands are living lives of abject misery, so near to the Mediterranean and the civilized world of the Greeks, where it all starts from, yet bombed into the Dark Ages. The world at large has witnessed much cruelty, and more cruelty, as a mere spectator: the haunting memories of the devastation inflicted on the innocent population of Gaza, the killing of five sisters through a shot in the window for no apparent reason.

I do not know how anyone is going to justify any of that. But where is the moral outrage that translates itself into something tangible — a meaningful change in the lives of the Palestinians? While Israel deserves criticism, no less responsible is the international community, which is complicit in its inaction. The proverbial water off a duck's back rings true here. The attacks on the United Nations buildings and personnel itself showed complete disrespect. It was not the physical damage caused alone, but the icon that tumbled and crumbled with a lot of innocence inside. The Secretary-General's initiative for a Board of Inquiry is welcomed by us.

But we must not lose sight of the larger picture. The general sense of pessimism around the peace process does not augur well. The international community needs to refocus its attention and to synergize its energies and its efforts to reinvigorate the peace process of negotiation and to address all core issues for a comprehensive and just settlement and for the durable solution for which the parameters already exist, namely, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Peace Conference terms of reference, the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principles set out at the Annapolis Conference. There must also be parallel progress on the Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon tracks for a comprehensive peace in the region.

In conclusion, an early comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the core issue of Palestine, should be our collective strategic objective. All Member States must throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Indeed, that would have a positive impact on regional and international peace and security and help stabilize other simmering situations across the region. While remaining fully committed to the just cause of the Palestinian people, Pakistan will continue to play its rightful role in the collective endeavour to establish lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Escalona Ojeda (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, Mr. President, to greet you very respectfully and to express, on behalf of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, our appreciation to you for the important work that you have been doing at the helm of the Security Council. We acknowledge your resolute commitment to peace and the

defence of the sovereignty of the peoples of the world, in particular of Palestine.

When our Government, through the Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations, expressed its views on the Middle East crisis and on the situation in Palestine in this body, we warned of the urgent need to prevent the Government of Israel from committing, through its war machine, what we predicted would be a crime against humanity. Those 22 days of occupation and aggression between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, according to figures provided by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, have borne that out.

During the occupation, 1,434 Palestinians died, of whom 235 were combatants, 239 police officers and 960 civilians, including 288 children and 121 women. Also, 5,303 Palestinians were wounded, of whom 1,606 were children and 828 women. Even today, most have not been able to return to a normal life as a result of war-inflicted injuries. In the world's memory, there has never been such callousness displayed before our very eyes.

Our Government is emphatic in denouncing the flagrant violation of international law and of the human rights of the Palestinian people in Gaza. The ineffective application of resolution 1860 (2009) of 8 January 2009, which has still not been implemented, brought about the tragedy that we deplore today. The resolution, in which the Security Council called for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, sadly illustrated the inaction of the major Powers in urging Israel to stop the attacks against Gaza. Nor has the blockade been lifted; nor is there free transit to allow humanitarian aid to enter and to put an end to Gaza being a prison and concentration camp.

We must remember that the Bolivarian Government of President Hugo Chávez Frías decided to expel the Israeli Ambassador to our country for disproportionate and unjustifiable military action against the Palestinian people. United Nations Special Rapporteur Richard Falk himself urged the Organization "to take urgent action to protect a civilian population being subjected to collective punishment that amounts to a crime against humanity". At that time, Mr. Falk believed that the International Criminal Court should investigate the situation in order to establish if the Israeli civilian and military leaders responsible for the Gaza siege should be indicted and tried for violations of international criminal law.

Today, we note that despite General Assembly resolution ES-10/8, adopted by the General Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session on illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, held on 15 and 16 January 2009, which called for an end to the occupation, the Israeli aggression continues. United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories Richard Falk has again reported that Israel committed massive violations during the 22 days of its invasion of the Gaza Strip. He confirmed that the bombings carried out by Israeli forces on the Palestinian civilian population constituted a massive violation of international humanitarian law. The report of the Special Rapporteur will be very important for the Human Rights Council in Geneva to confirm that the Israeli Government committed war crimes under the Geneva Conventions. The findings of the United Nations expert are conclusive. The Israeli army carried out crimes such as the deliberate execution of women and children by sharpshooters. It deliberately destroyed infrastructure such as schools, universities, public services, electricity and water systems and 21,000 homes, thus worsening the already negative human development indicators and dragging the population of Gaza to the lowest levels of poverty.

The Government of Israel cannot indefinitely remain beyond international laws. Complacency and complicity clearly have negative consequences on Palestinians every day. Worse yet, however, they create a precedent that could affect all countries, including as regards international impunity, which could create an environment for the destabilization of the international system. Hence, it is important to establish criminal responsibility for what took place, lest the Security Council lose even further credibility and legitimacy.

Our criticism of the Israeli Government and Israeli army policy of genocide cannot be mistaken for anti-Semitism. The Bolivarian Government respects the Jewish people and its religious beliefs and practices. In Venezuela, Jewish communities enjoy full guarantees that their culture, economic well-being and social aspirations will be respected — as befits a tolerant, multi-ethnic and multicultural country that demonstrates tolerance both to those born in Venezuela and to immigrants. Our respect is extended to Jewish people in Venezuela and throughout the world.

We believe in the importance of all initiatives towards the attainment of peace in the Middle East, in particular the demand by Palestine as a nation for peace, respect for its sovereignty and the full development of its people. The League of Arab States is playing a fundamental role in that regard. The United Nations must stress the need to meet the urgent needs of the population and bring about lasting peace. That will be possible only if justice is systematically sought.

It is a fact that there can be no peace in the Middle East so long as the occupation continues, so long as the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is denied, so long as inhumane and degrading practices continue daily against thousands of Palestinians, and so long as colonization, carried out through Israeli settlements, continues.

In the midst of its tragedy, Palestine has produced great poets, lending distinction to the memory of its people. I shall conclude by quoting from "Homeland," by the Palestinian poet Ibrahim Nasrallah.

> "Under the yoke of our mornings
> The sun crumbles
> And in the darkness of our steps
> Our panting breath is on fire
> These incomplete homelands
> In which we appear to be
> Nothing more than prisoners of war."

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor, and I call on him now.

Mr. Weissbrod (Israel): I will not take much of the Council's time, but will only make a short remark on the speeches of the representatives of Syria and Iran. It is astonishing that countries that continue to actively support terror, sabotage the peace process and encourage suicide bombings and that continue to smuggle arms to the region — Lebanon and Gaza — in these very days and these very moments are lecturing us about the peace process, moral values and human rights records. I suggest to those countries and to some other Member States that spoke to dig into their own human rights records before speaking about others. In Israel, we are proud of the sense of self-criticism that we have as a society and as a State. We hope that countries like Syria and Iran, and some other Member States that spoke, will have a bit of that sense of self-criticism.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor, and I call on him now. I would ask that he be brief.

Mr. Falouh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor again. I wish only to respond to the statement just made by the representative of Israel. That statement included misleading claims and distortions of the truth, which form part of Israel's desperate campaign to deflect the attention of world public opinion from the activities, atrocities and holocaust daily carried out by the terrorist State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Any attentive and wise observer will immediately see that the Israeli representative's claims and allegations today are intended to camouflage Israeli violations of the sovereignty of Lebanon and of resolution 1701 (2006). The reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) underscore that Lebanon's Common Border Force, which comprises the four main relevant Lebanese Government agencies, has not found any instance of arms smuggling. That very significant information is in line with previous statements of senior Lebanese officials and the findings of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Teams I and II.

Israel's statements do not alter the fact that Israel possesses the largest, blackest record of terrorism, which would need an encyclopaedia, a museum and an archive to document and shed light on the crimes of genocide, war crimes and ethnic cleansing carried out against the Palestinians, the Syrians, the Lebanese, the Egyptians, the Jordanians and others by Israel throughout its bloody history.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has asked for the floor, and I call on him now.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am not going to take very much of the Council's time, because we have already placed on record my country's position. I just wanted to reiterate that we reject the baseless allegations raised yet again by the representative of the Israeli regime. Undoubtedly — and needless to say — these are statements that are made only to distract the international community's attention from where it should be, and that is the Israeli

crimes and atrocities, which are very well known to the international community. Time and again they have been emphasized not only by Iran and some of the other countries that the representative of Israel mentioned, but actually by the whole membership of the Council and by the whole international community. We are on record as condemning in the strongest terms all those crimes and atrocities, which are perpetrated against the Palestinian people. Indeed, the Israeli regime has actually displayed one of the clearest examples of State terrorism. The State terrorism which is being practised by the Israeli regime, together with the nuclear weapons that are in the hands of that regime and also coupled with its wicked behaviour, poses one of the greatest threats that the region and the international community are facing today.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.